THE GLAMOUR OF PROSPECTING



FRED C. CORNELL

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THE AUTHOR AT NAKOB, READY FOR A LONG TRIP.

[Frontispiece.

THE GLAMOUR OF PROSPECTING

WANDERINGS OF A SOUTH AFRICAN PROSPECTOR IN SEARCH OF COPPER, GOLD, EMERALDS, AND DIAMONDS

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

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PREFACE

Most of this record of wanderings in wild parts of South Africa had been written and was ready for publication before the outbreak of war : and since then there has been a radical alteration in much of the country described ; for, with the conquest of German South-West by General Botha, the Union Jack now floats over the huge tract of country between the lower Orange River, the twentieth degree of east longitude, Portuguese Angola, and the South Atlantic.

As a result also of that campaign, new railway lines have come into being, and with the linking-up of the railway between Prieska, Upington, and the captured German system at Kalkfontein, the traveller to-day can ride in comfort in a saloon carriage from Cape Town to the farthest extremities of the conquered territory.

And, incidentally, many of the wild spots I have described have been brought within easy reach. For instance, the lonely little police post at Nakob (described in the closing chapters, and the scene of the violation of Union territory by German troops) was, at the outbreak of war, separated by 250 miles of difficult, semi-desert country from the nearest British railway at Prieska. To-day the line runs close by where the post stood, and passes within sight of the hill in British territory the Germans then occupied.

Upington, too, with a fine bridge spanning the Orange, has been brought into touch with the rest of South Africa ; and, with the fertile oasis of the Orange River stretching on either hand and giving marvellous results in the growing of citrus and other fruits, cannot fail to become an important and thriving centre. There are rich mineral deposits in the vicinity, one

of which (the " Areachap " copper-mine, mentioned in Chapter V) has, I believe, been reopened since the railway at Upington has rendered 150 miles of costly waggon transport unnecessary, and the marvellous " Great Falls of the Orange River," ranking, with the Victoria Falls and Niagara, amongst the world's greatest cataracts, is now within a day's journey of the railway, and with the coming of peace, will undoubtedly be visited by thousands of visitors, and come to its own.

A railway has also been built to within easy distance of Van Ryn's Dorp (mentioned in Chapter IV), and it is safe to predict that these new lines will be productive of a great accession of mineral wealth to the Union, wealth that has hitherto lain untouched and unexploited owing to its great distance from a railway.

These new lines, however, much as may be expected of them, still leave untapped vast spaces of the country I have described. Notably the mountainous Richtersfeldt region of Northern Klein Namaqualand (see Chapters VII to XI), with all its wealth of copper and other minerals, and which lies to-day as solitary and untrodden as when I left it. The Southern Kalahari, with its fine ranching possibilities and its remarkable " pans," is still a huge " Royal Game Reserve," forbidden to the farmer and the prospector; and though the dry Kuruman River (Chapter XVII) was the route for the flying invasion of German South-West (to the astonishment of the Germans, who believed the desert impossible by troops), the desert has long since claimed its own again : and the region is once more given over to the vast herds of gemsbok and a few wandering Bushmen.

To turn to the newly acquired territory of Great Namaqualand and Damaraland, much of the latter still remains practically unexplored, and although concessions over vast tracts of country were granted to various private companies by the German Administration, few attempts have been made to develop the great mineral wealth known to exist. There are

exceptions, notably the rich copper deposits of Otavi and the Khan copper-mine, both having been worked to great advantage prior to the war, whilst the remarkable diamond discoveries on the coast have added enormously to the wealth of the country. But much of Northern Damaraland, Ovampoland, and Amboland, etc., has scarcely been scratched, and this is notably the case in the vast *terra incognita* of the north-western portion known as the " Kokoa Veldt." Here but little prospecting has ever been allowed, but copper abounds, tin and gold have been found, and the former in abundance, and there are other valuable minerals and precious stones waiting the day when the territory in question is thrown open to individual enterprise.

In conclusion, let me point out that this book, though recording faithfully some of my own prospecting trips, is in no wise intended to serve as a handbook to the would-be prospector ; indeed, he should carefully avoid doing many of the things herein recorded. But should he contemplate becoming a prospector, let him at any rate not be discouraged by reading of the few discomforts and hardships I have experienced, for these, after all, were richly compensated for by the glorious freedom and adventure of the finest of outdoor lives, spent in one of the finest countries and climates of the world. And far be it from me to do anything to discourage the prospector. He is, I maintain, the true pioneer ; his pick and hammer open up the wild places of the earth (usually to the benefit of those who follow him more than to his own), and, in the rush for " fresh scenes and pastures new " which will inevitably follow the war, he will be a factor of importance.

The ideal prospector is born, not made. He may be versed in geology and mineralogy and excel with the blow-pipe, but unless he has the love of wild places in his bones he will never fulfil his purpose. He must be an " adventurer " in the older and honourable sense of the word ; often, unfortunately, he " fills the bill " in the more sordid sense. He should

be able to ride, shoot, walk, climb, and swim with the best ; indeed, if he still exists in the future, he will probably also need to fly. And the wilds must call him. "Something hid behind the ranges! Go and look behind the ranges!" as Kipling has it. That is the true spirit of the prospector ; he must love his work or he will never succeed in it. I have had men out with me who were good enough theoretically, but were quite useless to cope with the misadventures they had to encounter, and soon gave up the life for something easier. I have had others to whom the glamour of a life spent in the wilds, with the sand for a couch and the stars for a ceiling, outweighed all its little disadvantages.

FRED C. CORNELL.

CAPE TOWN, 1919.

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THE GLAMOUR OF PROSPECTING

CHAPTER I

SOME WILD-GOOSE CHASES—DISCOVERY OF DIAMONDS IN GERMAN SOUTH-WEST AFRICA—BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NEW MANDATORY, LUDERITZBUCHT.

WHAT gave me "diamond fever" I don't pretend to say. Certainly I have no love for the cut and finished article, and nothing would induce me to wear it; but for the rough stone, and for the rough life entailed in searching for it, I have always had a passion. Yet the luck attending many of my ventures has been but bad, or at the best, indifferent. The first tiny glittering crystal that I found at the bottom of my wooden "batea" in Brazil, many years ago, had cost me weeks of hard work and every penny I possessed; and the months of hard digging and perilous prospecting that followed that first "find," and that led me through the diamond-fields of Diamantina and Minhas Geraes, left me none the richer except in experience. But the memory of those long-ago hardships is a faint thing compared with the glamour that still clings to that time; and even here in South Africa, the home of the diamond, not all the vicissitudes of years spent on the Vaal River Diggings, or of prospecting in far wilder spots, have taken away the fascination that, to me, lies in this most precarious of all professions. Still, the fruitless searches have been many, and I have often been called upon to make long and arduous trips where the quest of precious stones has proved nothing but a wild-goose chase.

A stray diamond, very possibly dropped by an ostrich, and maybe the only one for a hundred square miles, has often led to a rush to where it was found, whilst, frequently, circumstantial tales of the finding of " precious " stones have been founded on the picking up of a beautiful but worthless quartz crystal.

At no period of late years were rumours as to the finding of diamonds more rife in South Africa than in 1907, when the sands of Luderitzbucht, in adjacent German territory, were found to be full of them, and when luck led me many hundreds of miles in another direction, and spoilt my chance of being one of the first in those new and wonderful fields.

Ever since the discovery of the first South African diamond in the Hopetown District in 1867, a belief has been prevalent among the thousands of diamond seekers scattered along the Vaal River Diggings that rich fields of a similar nature must exist far lower down-stream. Yet, although the theory is logical enough, and many expeditions have from time to time searched the banks far beyond the confluence of Vaal and Orange, and a few have even reached the little-known lower reaches of the latter and located both promising gravel and even stray diamonds, nothing of a payable nature has so far been discovered in that direction.

In the latter part of 1907 I was shown an extremely beautiful stone of about twenty carats, that had been picked up by a transport rider some fifty miles below Prieska ; and the accompanying gravel that this man brought in was so exactly a replica of the Vaal River " wash " that I came to terms with the finder and set about arranging a small expedition to accompany him and test the spot.

Before completing my arrangements, I went into Kimberley to try and find an old digger partner of mine, who had always been particularly anxious to explore the lower Orange River, and who, I thought, would be just the man to accompany me.

After some trouble I found him, and before I

could even broach the subject of my visit he opened fire on me. "The very man I wanted to see," he burst out; "in fact, I was just writing to you. Man, I've just seen a whole lot of diamonds from a new place entirely; they're small, but the chap who found them swears you can pick them up by the handful where he got them."

It appeared that the finder of these small stones was again a transport rider, who had been working in German South-West Africa, and had brought back a small phial full of these tiny stones, which he said could be had for the picking up anywhere in the sand near a certain bay he knew of. An hour later my friend had found him again, and I saw them for myself—nearly fifty small, clean, and brilliantly polished little diamonds, of good quality, astonishingly alike in size, and quite different from either "mine" or "river" stones in appearance.

The man's story was circumstantial enough, and March, my former partner, was most anxious to accompany him back to German South-West, and tried hard to induce me to join him.

Now, for years rumours had been current among prospectors and diamond diggers, as to the existence of the precious gems in abundance somewhere along the desolate, wind-swept shores of the little-known country lying north and west of the Orange; but the region was too remote and too inhospitable to encourage expeditions in that direction, and the German *régime* of the country by no means added to its attractiveness. So that, tempting as the little "sandstones" were, I was not to be persuaded; moreover, I had committed myself to the other venture and consoled myself with the reflection that, after all, my one big diamond from the Orange River was worth more than the whole phialful brought from German territory. And when I told my tale in turn and spoke of the big twenty-carat beauty I had seen, not only did March promptly decide to come with me, but Du Toit, the discoverer of the German stones, immediately threw in his lot with us, arguing,

doubtless, that it would be easier and quicker to fill bottles with big diamonds than with little ones. "Anyway," he said, "the other place can wait; we can go there afterwards if we think it worth while." And so it was agreed, and thereby we probably missed a fortune, for the place where Du Toit had found the diamonds is to-day one of the richest diamond-fields in South-West Africa.

Anyway, the decision once arrived at, we lost no time in getting under way, and a few days later we were on our way towards the spot where the twenty-carat stone had been found, and which we fondly hoped would prove as rich in big stones as Du Toit declared the sands of the German coast were in small.

Into the details of that disastrous trip I shall not enter here. Suffice it to say that four months later, ragged, footsore, broken in health and practically penniless, we tramped back into Prieska, having searched the southern bank of the river for nearly three hundred miles without having found a single diamond. Gravel there was in abundance, containing all the so-called "indications"—agates, jasper, chalcedony, banded ironstone—in fact, all the usual accompaniments of the diamond as they are found higher up the river, but never the diamond itself.

So good had these "indications" been that we were eternally buoyed up by the hope that sooner or later we must strike the right place, and so we had wandered on till the fine outfit we had started with had gone piecemeal to keep us in food; and it was only when our small funds were absolutely exhausted, and our tools and kit reduced to what we stood in and could carry, that we gave up the quest of the "Fata Morgana" that had led us on and on into the wild country near the "Great Falls" below Kakamas, and beyond all trace of civilisation.

For weeks we had had no news, and had not seen a newspaper or received a letter for months, and I well remember, when at long last we reached Prieska, with what eagerness we hastened to the little post-office for the budget we expected waiting for us.

And the very first letter I opened told me what this particular wild-goose chase had cost us, for both it and numerous wires and newspapers of long weeks back told of the sensational discovery of diamonds in the sands of German South-West, and the fabulous finds that the lucky first-comers had made there.

Newspaper reports spoke of men picking them up by the handful, filling their pockets with them in an hour or two, of bucketsful lying in the Bank. In fact, it was Sinbad's wonderful "Valley of Diamonds" over again; and, giving due allowance for the exaggeration usual to such discoveries, there still could be no doubt that we had missed a fortune by not going there with Du Toit four months back, instead of on our disastrous trip down the river.

I had always liked Du Toit, who was one of the best Afrikanders I ever met, but never did he show to such advantage as when he got this news; his sun-flayed face went a shade pale as he read it, but all he said was, "Ah, well, better luck next time, boys."

But we didn't get it.

At De Aar the little party divided, March and our guide of the last venture going back to the River Diggings, whilst Du Toit and myself returned to Cape Town, intent on getting up to German South-West Africa as soon as possible.

And as German South-West Africa, now a Mandatory of the Union of South Africa, will figure prominently in these pages, it may be as well to give a brief account of that extensive country, which, until the discovery of diamonds already alluded to, was very little known to the average man even in Cape Colony, its next-door neighbour.

As early as 1867, owing to reports of rich mineral deposits existing in the country then known as Great Namaqualand and Damaraland, the Cape Government proposed to the Imperial Government the annexation of the whole of the West African coast-line from the Orange River to Portuguese Angola,

but no definite action ensued. And, in spite of various "Resolutions" the Cape Government subsequently made in favour of this extension of territory, nothing happened till 1877, when a Special Commission was sent to Damaraland, where they received offers of submission from the principal chiefs of the country.

The Imperial Government was, however, adverse to taking over the whole of this vast coast-line, with its then unknown hinterland, but sanctioned the hoisting of the British flag at Walfish Bay, the natural port of a huge stretch of country; and this tiny mouthful of territory, bitten as it were out of the surrounding country that so soon afterwards became German, has, much to the annoyance of Berlin, remained British ever since.

At the time this annexation took place the hinterland was well populated by various native tribes, the Damaras (also known as Hereros), a people of Bantu descent who came from the north, and the Namaquas, a Hottentot race who had gradually spread from the south.

The true aboriginals of the country were probably what are known to-day as "Berg Damaras," a little people of Bushman characteristics, small in numbers, but ethnologically of far greater interest than either of the two invading races. On the irruption of the Namaquas, these aboriginals were mostly conquered and enslaved, but a few escaped to the mountains, and retain their national characteristics to this day. Herero and Namaqua eventually met somewhere about the vicinity of where Windhuk now stands, and for a time each treated the other with respect; but about 1840 the Namaquas, strengthened by the accession to their ranks of certain half-breed desperadoes who had fled from Cape Colony and who were well armed and mounted, attacked the Damaras to such purpose that they were soon completely conquered and enslaved, and Jager Afrikander, the chief refugee and desperado, became their chief. Between 1863 and 1870, however, the Damaras

again rose and waged a war of independence, being, however, again crushed. Ten years later a rising again occurred, and the whole country was plunged in warfare. Meanwhile, however, the white man had arrived upon the scene, the British at Walfish Bay, and numerous white pioneers, including many Germans, had penetrated the country beyond it.

Prominent among the pioneers were several missionaries of the Rhenish Missionary Society, and upon their heels followed the traders, so that when in 1880 the above-mentioned native trouble broke out, a considerable number of white men were settled in the interior.

As British responsibility was conterminous with the boundaries of her Walfish Bay territory, these venturesome settlers had but little protection afforded them; and as German enterprise developed farther south and trading ventures were started, Germany asked the British Government for its protection for these pioneers. Certain negotiations followed, and by June 1884 Germany had made up its mind to extend its own protection to its subjects in Damaraland and Great Namaqualand, and incidentally to afford the cover of its sovereignty to an enormous concession of land near Angra Pequena which had been obtained by a wealthy Bremen merchant named Luderitz from certain native chiefs.

This bay of Angra Pequena, so named by the Portuguese who discovered it, is now known as Luderitzbucht; it lies about two hundred and fifty miles south of Walfish Bay, and, although vastly inferior to the latter port, also affords good anchorage. Here Luderitz started large trading stations; and in 1884, in pursuance of Bismarck's scheme of colonial expansion, a belt of land twenty miles in width along the coast from the Orange River northward to Portuguese territory (excluding, of course, Walfish Bay) was placed under the protection of the German Empire.

From that time German expansion marched quickly,

and in June 1885 the German dominion was extended over the whole of the vast hinterland up to the 20th parallel of east longitude, the Gordonia border of the present day.

Late in the day, but luckily just in time, the statesmen of Cape Colony realised that this was but a step towards driving a German barrier across South Africa from sea to sea; and as a counter-stroke, in 1885, Bechuanaland (lying east of the new territory) was annexed as far north as the Molopo River, and declared under British protection up to the northern confines of the Kalahari Desert.

The Germans, foiled in their design of further expansion, set about making the most they could of Damaraland. But red tape, officialism, and their harsh and overbearing methods, hampered them in their attempt at colonisation; moreover much of the land was practically desert and up to the time of the discovery of diamonds at Luderitzbucht the country had been run at a loss, and there had been a determined attempt by the Socialists in the Reichstag to force its abandonment.

The Herero and Hottentot rebellion in 1903 dragged on for years, and cost the Germans much blood and treasure, for they found themselves utterly unable to cope with the extraordinary mobility of the native commandos. These, excelling in guerilla warfare, harassed them incessantly, and, although in vastly inferior numbers, gave the raw German troops—fresh to the country—endless trouble before they were subdued or captured.

Towards the end of this costly campaign the warfare was waged with extreme bitterness, and indeed it ended in the virtual extermination of the Herero race.

With this slight, and, I hope, pardonable digression, I will return to Cape Town, where Du Toit and I at length embarked for Luderitzbucht.

The *Frieda Woerman* took us up the coast in



"BABYING" FOR DIAMONDS.

The machine is called a "baby" (or more correctly "bébé," after the French digger who invented it), and is universally used by South African diamond diggers.

comfort. We passed Port Nolloth in a fog which showed us nothing of the forlorn little northern copper port, and fog clung to us till we reached Luderitzbucht.

These sea-fogs are a feature of the South-West African coasts, and on the British (Namaqualand) coast they are beneficial, as they distribute a certain amount of moisture to the scanty vegetation of the coastal belt ; but at Luderitzbucht there is no vegetation for the fog to moisten.

For, north, south, and east of it there is nothing but sand and barren rocks, and this description applies to practically the whole of the coast belt for hundreds of miles in either direction.

Luderitzbucht, at the time of which I write, was little more than a forlorn collection of corrugated iron huts clustering around one or two of the more important buildings, dignified by the names of "hotel," store, and Customs House. The streets were ankle deep in sand, and the first thing that struck me was the enormous number of empty bottles that lay piled and scattered about in all directions—principally beer bottles, of course, but also thousands of mineral-water bottles, for water was at that time extremely scarce. The very little obtained locally was of poor quality, had a vile alkaline taste, and often alarming medicinal effects upon the new-comer ; moreover, it had never been sufficient even for the scanty population existing here before the discovery of diamonds. A large condensing plant had supplied the deficiency in an intermittent manner, for it frequently broke down or got out of order, and it was the usual thing in the early days to have cargoes of water brought by steamer from Cape Town.

With the discovery of diamonds came the influx of "all sorts and conditions of men" usual to "rushes" all over the world, and water rose to famine prices. Washing in sea-water, when tried by a few over-particular new-chums, was followed by extremely painful results, for the brine aggravated a hundredfold the painful sun-blisters inevitable in a

country where the blazing rays of a sub-tropical sun beat back with redoubled fierceness from the glaring, scorching, all-pervading sand. A helmet, whilst absolutely essential, is after all but little protection from a glare that comes from the sand all around one as from a huge mirror. We soon found that, if this glare was to be borne at all, it was by using spectacles of smoked glass, and these, fitted with wire gauze side-protectors, are also essential in the blinding sand-storms that form a frequent variation of Luderitzbucht weather conditions.

We found the place so crowded that it was almost impossible to obtain even the roughest accommodation ; the hotels were full, the stores were full, every shanty dignified by the name of a dwelling was crammed, men "pigging it" four and six in tiny rooms meant for a single occupant, and food, and above all water, at famine prices.

So great had been the rush, for a time, that the police had been quite unable to cope with it, and when I came to see more of the motley crowd of "fortune seekers" that had invaded the place, I easily forgave the irascibility of the stout, overfed and overheated German officials who had had to deal with them all. What a lot they were ! Only a small minority were genuine prospectors, engineers, or mining-men with a legitimate interest in the diamond discoveries ; the majority were shady "company promoters," bucket-shop experts, warned-off bookmakers and betting-men ("brokers" they usually styled themselves), and sharpers of all sorts, on the lookout for prey in the shape of lucky diggers or discoverers. Then, too, there were a number of self-styled "prospectors," runaway ships' cooks, stewards, stokers, and seamen, the bulk of whom had never seen a rough diamond in their lives, and of course a modicum of genuine men of past experience—principally ex-"river-diggers"—men whose small capital was running away like water for bare necessities in this miserable dust-hole of creation.

We soon found that most of the available land in the vicinity of Luderitzbucht had been taken up, and much of it had already changed hands two or three times. Companies and syndicates were being " floated " at a great rate, many of them by unscrupulous scoundrels of promoters, acting upon the " reports " of equally lying and unscrupulous " prospectors."

Schurfscheinen (prospecting licences) were at that time transferable, and as they were daily becoming more difficult to procure, they often changed hands several times, and for quite large sums, before they were even used for their legitimate purpose of enabling the holder to locate and peg-off a claim. And often, when, as a result of an expensive expedition, ground was located and title secured, the diamonds shown to back up the " discoverer's " or " promoter's " highly coloured report would be the only ones ever seen by the gullible purchaser or shareholder.

The conditions under which diamonds were found made " salting " a very easy matter to carry out and a very difficult one to detect. The small and brightly polished little gems, usually running three or four to the carat—that is to say, about the size of hemp-seed—were generally found in the surface deposit of loose sandy shingle spread over much of the sand-belt near the coast, and differing from the sand of the country only in being slightly coarser. This loose deposit, in common with the sand, is in many places heaped up into small, wave-like ripples by the action of the prevailing wind, and wherever the diamonds exist these little ridges are exceptionally rich in them. The method of searching for them was simply by crawling along almost flat upon the ground, and turning over the shallow layer with a knife-point, though on some of the claims hand-washing in sea-water was being attempted. Most of the diamonds so far had come from a place known as " Kolman's Kop," a mile or two inland from the bay, and on the railway to Aus—indeed, the line ran right through this diamondiferous area—and it

was here that Du Toit had picked up his stones. So plentiful were the little " crystals " that many a little bottleful of them had been brought into Luderitzbucht in the early days and given away as curiosities, without the slightest notion as to what they really were.

A few keen-eyed Kaffirs engaged in construction work on the railway, and who had worked in the Kimberley mines or on the Vaal River Diggings, first realised what they really were, and several of these " boys," who afterwards came to Cape Town, and there attempted to sell the stones, were convicted and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment under the provisions of the " I.D.B." Act of Cape Colony.

Few, if any, of those who read the report of their trials believed their story that they had picked up the stones in the sands of German South-West Africa, but the few who did believe and made investigation were amply repaid for their trouble, for the first-comers picked up diamonds by the handful.

A few days tramping the surrounding district soon convinced us that all the likely ground near Luderitzbucht had been taken up—and indeed much that was unlikely—and we decided to clear off to an outlying district where distance and want of water had thus far prevented " prospectors " from penetrating.

A general examination of the gravel, sand, and various deposits had shown to we old diggers the significant fact that, whatever the origin of the diamonds, there was some analogy between these fields and those of the Vaal River Diggings, for prominent everywhere were the familiar pebbles of striped agate, chalcedony, jasper, etc., we knew so well. Most of these pebbles were, however, very much smaller than those of the Vaal River; moreover the action of wind and water had " graded " the loose deposits to such an extent that whole acres appeared to have been worked by sieves of a uniform mesh.

Now, this "grading" was also a feature of the diamonds themselves, for they were of a remarkably uniform size, and in this respect differed entirely from those of any other known deposit; for at Kimberley, or on the Vaal River Diggings, one of the fascinations of the precarious profession of diamond-digging lies in the fact that big and little stones are found together, and the next spadeful of ground may bring the digger a stone the size of a pea, or one the size of a potato. Now, the general theory as to how the diamonds came to be in the Luderitzbucht sands was that they had come from the sea, either from a rich pipe beneath it, or from a huge deposit washed down the Vaal and Orange Rivers during the course of countless ages, and out to sea, whence the north-setting current had brought the diamonds ashore. And we—pundits all—believed that, as the sea had obviously done the work of "grading" the stones, there must exist vastly heavier deposits *somewhere* along the coast, where, it should follow, we should also find vastly bigger diamonds. And those were what we wanted, the bigger the better.

CHAPTER II

RUMOUR OF "HOTTENTOTS' PARADISE"—UP THE COAST ON A SEALING CUTTER—WALFISH BAY.

At that time rumour was rife that, somewhere in the terrible wilderness of sand-dunes stretching north-east of Luderitzbucht, there existed an oasis where not only water was plentiful, but where diamonds, big ones, abounded. This fabled oasis was usually called the "Hottentots' Paradise," and tradition maintained that to this remote and inaccessible spot the remnant of that poor degenerate race of natives that had escaped extermination at the hands of the Germans in the recent rebellion had retreated. It was also rumoured that these men were well armed, that they had cattle and food in abundance, and that, cut off by a wilderness of waterless country, the Germans had hesitated to attack them. There were other versions; in fact, no two agreed exactly, except that the oasis was situated somewhere between Luderitzbucht, Walfish Bay, the high plateau of the interior, and the sea, and that there the diamonds were as big as they were abundant.

Already one or two abortive expeditions had started with the intention of searching for this place, but none of them had got far; thirst had in each instance conquered them; and at least one had lost every animal it started with.

One day, when we were looking round as to the best direction in which to make our own attempt, I was asked by a prospector to join an expedition just being outfitted to search for this place, and he put such a plausible tale before me that I hastened to consult Du Toit. He shook his head when I told him the way this expedition proposed travelling.

"No water," he said; "they'll be back within a week, if they get back at all! There are only two ways of searching for the place: from the coast, having a boat with plenty of water waiting you, or with camels. These fellows talk of mules—well, let 'em go. I've heard of something better."

Then he told me he had met a man he had known on the River Diggings who had turned sealer, and had for some years past plied his dangerous trade along this wind-swept coast in a little ten-ton cutter, and that this man had told him that north of Sylvia Heights there existed a wonderful beach where the pebbles were identical with those of the Vaal River Diggings, but that they were very much larger. He said they lay graded by the tide for miles and miles along the beach—agates, chalcedonies, jaspers, and banded ironstones (the *bandtom* of the digger); and that, when he had come back from a holiday in Europe and found all Luderitzbucht diamond-mad, he had resolved to go to this beach, where he believed he would find them lying thick, but that he had been in some trouble with the police and could not get a *Schurfschein.* As we both had obtained these valuable documents, he was quite prepared to run us up to this spot in his little cutter, sharing expenses, and sharing in all claims we might be able to peg.

Now, this seemed a perfectly God-sent opportunity for locating the "big stones" we all felt certain existed, and we set about getting in stores for the trip at once. These consisted principally of hard biscuit, "bully beef," tea, coffee, and sugar, and above all water. Of the latter we had two fairly large breakers, and a miscellaneous collection of other utensils, ranging from big oil-drums to canvas water-bottles—in all, an ample supply for fifteen or twenty days. We went on board that very evening. Besides our pal the skipper, there were two other hands, men who, had they chosen to wash themselves, would probably have proved to be white, but who were so coated with seal oil and the accumulated grime of

many voyages that it was impossible to say what colour was underneath it all. They spoke a jargon that they fondly imagined was English, but I believe they were Scandinavians of sorts. The little half-decked cutter barely held us and our belongings, and would have been none too comfortable even for a short trip such as we hoped for and anticipated.

And, unfortunately, our voyage was both long and disagreeable, for we had scarcely got clear of Luderitz Bay one fine evening than it came on to blow great guns, and so heavy did the weather become that our skipper had to run clean out to sea. Up to then I had fondly imagined I knew something about the sea, and was proof against such a very amateur malady as sea-sickness; but alas! I had a lot to learn. Indeed, I soon found that, in spite of a good deal of knocking about the sea at various times, I really knew nothing of bad weather. There was no snuggling down in a cosy cabin or the soft cushions of a big saloon about this experience, no looking at big seas through the comforting protection of thick plate-glass portholes. Here the huge waves were towering, threatening, imminent; and nothing but the coolest of heads, and strongest and steadiest of hands at the helm, could have kept the little cockle-shell from shipping a big sea and foundering. Portions of big seas she shipped repeatedly, and little seas in the intervals; in fact, for hours she appeared to consider herself to be a sort of submarine of which I suppose I must have been the periscope—for I was continually endeavouring to stand erect in my attempt to dodge the waves. Within an hour or two of leaving the bay I was wet through, and continued so till I got on shore again; and during that period of three nights and two days I had ample reason to know that sea-sickness is not nearly as laughable as it looks! They gave me rum and water, and it made me worse; they coaxed me with hard ship's biscuit and fat bully beef, and somehow it failed to entice me. Once, in a comparatively dry interval, they managed to light a stove and make some alleged

coffee. It tasted so of seal oil that it merely effected the apparently impossible by making me feel worse than I did before.

The skipper assured me that it was all my fancy when I told him that the coffee-pot must have been used for trying down seal, and offered to prove it by making another brew in the legitimate utensil used for that purpose, that I might taste the difference. The only consolation I had during the whole memorable sixty hours was that Du Toit was apparently even worse than myself. He did not even attempt to dodge the water as we shipped it, but lay with closed eyes and hands mechanically clutching the oily stays, just where the first spasm caught him, and except for groans, nothing coherent passed his lips but profanity during the whole voyage. We had left Luderitzbucht at sunset on Tuesday evening, and the gale that sprang up that night blew itself out sufficiently by Thursday afternoon to enable them to put the cutter about towards shore again. I did not witness the operation, but I heard some cryptic remarks thereto, and knew by the way the crew fell over me they were hurrying about something. Then the motion changed, and a wave went over me broadside instead of lengthways. The sail flapped furiously, and then she heeled over so that I rolled off my seat. And then a quite new motion began, a bobbing, jerking, wrenching movement that started fresh trouble. However, by dark that night we were in sight of land, and I began to have some faint hope that, after all, we might survive.

I was aroused from a broken and uneasy slumber by a chorus of quacks, and cackles, and grunts, sounding as though the cutter had run clean into a farmyard, and at this phenomenon I had just sufficient curiosity in me to open my eyes and sit up. Dawn was breaking and we were close to land, in comparatively smooth water, to the leeward of a small island, from which arose the hubbub I had heard. It was not a farmyard, however, but an island covered partly with big seals, and partly with penguins and

other sea-fowl in such incredible swarms that they jostled each other for elbow-room. This was one of the many guano and sealing islands lying off the coast of German South-West Africa, all of which are British possessions belonging to Cape Colony. On several of them diamonds are supposed to exist, but they are prohibited ground to prospectors. I believe this to have been Hollam's Bird Island, but had no chance to inquire as my sitting position immediately brought on the old trouble, and I had other urgent matters to attend to.

However, our troubles were almost over, for less than two hours later the cutter was deftly manœuvred into a little indentation where the water was comparatively smooth, and we got out the tiny dory that had filled up most of the cutter's foredeck room and landed. And never were men more pleased than Du Toit and I, and we there and then agreed that one trip in that cutter was enough. Once we had found the diamonds, we would send it back to Luderitzbucht to charter a decent-sized boat to go back in ; but as for travelling back ourselves in her—not much !

According to the skipper the beach he knew of lay about three or four miles down the coast, but this was the only safe landing-place and anchorage, and here we must camp. So we got our water and provisions ashore, and by the aid of a big bucksail and some driftwood we made a shelter to live and sleep in. This driftwood lay in abundance all along the sandy, desolate shore, and served excellently for fuel, though it was too dry and rotten to be of much service for anything else. The landing even of our few stores and belongings took up the best part of the day, and we decided not to make our first trip to our diamond beach till the morning ; but just before sunset Du Toit and I went a short distance inland to where the first high dunes began, and climbed a prominent one for a look-round. And east, north, and south there was nothing but sand ; not a tree anywhere, only here and there a stunted

bush struggling forlornly against adversity ; nothing but bare waves, mounds, and ridges of desolate dunes as far as the eye could reach, and to the west the equally (but not more) desolate ocean. No sign of life anywhere except a few gulls over the sea, though on our way back a jackal followed but a few paces behind, full of curiosity at the strange beings the like of whom he had probably never seen before. We saw several of these jackals during our stay there, and they were all quite fearless. Their spoors and those of the *stronte woolfe*, or brown hyena, were numerous, and the only spoors of any kind to be seen along the desolate shore, where these creatures probably picked up a precarious living from the dead fish occasionally stranded there. A short distance up the coast we found a flat space where the sand was comparatively hard, and where, apparently, in the past a shallow lagoon had existed. Here there were a few straggling bushes, thick-leaved and resinous, and scanty clumps of a sort of strong, wiry rush seemed to point to moisture at a short distance below the surface. Here, too, we found huge heaps of the shells of a species of large limpet, shell middens showing that at one time a people existed in the locality, probably the *strand looper*, the beach-roaming forerunner of both Bushman and Hottentot. But except for the shells, no vestige of him remained, nor of the water that he at one time drank at, though probably a few feet dug in the sand might have laid that bare.

I wanted badly to sleep that night, but apparently the others had different views. The sand was soft and dry, and a shallow hole scooped in it for my hip and a heap for my pillow, with a blanket spread over all, made a couch fit for a Sybarite, especially after the battering my bones had received on board the cutter. Du Toit was already snoring when I snuggled down, but I was far too used to his *basso profondo* to let that keep me awake, and was just dropping off when the skipper started an interminable argument with one of the other men on some weird technicality

connected with the sealer's craft, and kept it up apparently for hours. I did not like to interrupt them, but time after time, just as I got fairly under way, their voices woke me. I saw the big camp-fire of driftwood sink and die down till nothing but a few embers remained ; I saw the late moon rise and flood the wide solemn sea of dunes with mysterious light, saw the shadowy slinking forms of two or three jackals sneaking about, less than a stone's throw away ; heard the soft, soothing swish of the waves on the beach, and Du Toit's solo ; but above all came this incessant wrangle.

At last I called out to the skipper, " Look here, Jim, when are you fellows going to shut up ? It must be nearly morning, and I want to sleep ! "

" Sleep ? " said he. " Great Scott ! why, I thought you'd never want to sleep again ! Why, man, you slept all the way from Luderitzbucht here ! Sleep ? Why, you never opened your eyes all the way ! "

" That was sea-sickness," I said, " not sleep—sea-sickness ! "

" Must ha' been sleeping-sickness," he chuckled, and the two other asses chuckled too, and repeated his attempt at a witticism over and over again with fresh chuckles till I got too ratty to do anything but swear. And still they smoked, and talked, and yarned ; until at length, in sheer desperation, I grabbed my blankets and, with a parting benediction that must have kept them warm till morning, cleared away out of earshot, scraped a fresh couch out with a swipe of my foot, snuggled up in my blankets and went to sleep instantly.

I awoke shivering, for as usual along the coast the early morning had brought a dense sea-fog that enveloped everything, and had soaked my blankets through and through. It had been to guard against this drenching " Scotch mist " of a fog that we had erected the bucksail shelter, from which Jim and his co-idiots had driven me, and under which I now found them snoring in feeble opposition to Du Toit. They were snug and dry, but the big sail above hung



SEALERS AT OLIFANTS ROCKS.

The only white man (Irish) is the man standing behind.



TAKING THE HORSES ACROSS OLIFANTS RIVER.

bellying down with its soaking weight of accumulated moisture, whilst the guy-ropes were stretched taut for the same reason.

Of course I simply had to do it—they were too snug and dry and warm, and I was too wet and cold, to allow of any other course of action! So I just snicked the guy-ropes slightly in a weak spot and hurried back and turned in again in my wet blankets, hoping for the best. It came soon—a muffled squelch—followed by a perfect bedlam of polyglot profanity. I heard someone get mixed up with the pots and buckets and make disparaging remarks about them; I heard another's periods cut short by a sound impossible to write, but that conveyed a pleasant picture of an attempt to get rid of a full mouthful of sand—in fact, though I could see nothing, I could hear enough to conjure up a vivid picture of what was happening under that extremely wet and extremely heavy bucksail.

At length they struggled out, as I could visualise by the storm of recrimination and accusations.

"You donder!" I heard Du Toit snort (I found later his nose was badly bashed by a bucket). "I knew you didn't tie the *verdomte touw* properly!"

"Oh, blazes!" retorted Jim's voice, "here's a slab-sided son of a zand-trapper, that don't know a rope from a reim, trying to tell a sailor-man how to tie knots. H——! Why, you snored the blamed thing down! Where's your partner anyway? Asleep, I s'pose, under all that. Well! what did I say about sleeping-sickness?"

They then appeared to search for me; and then one of the incoherent gentlemen made a remark to Jim.

"So he did," I heard him agree; "cleared out when we were talking. I'd clean forgotten. He'll be asleep somewhere. Sleep!"

Then they came and found me, and of course found me asleep, and made fitting remarks.

I relate this little incident at full length because it happened to be the only cheerful happening of that disastrous trip.

Directly the fog lifted and we had re-erected the tent and had some breakfast, we took a sieve and a spade or two and started towards the beach, leaving one of the crew to watch tent and cutter. It was probably nearer four miles south than three—a long, wearisome drag through heavy sand for the most part, for the tide was high and we could not follow the water's edge.

At length we came to it, and I must confess that when I first set eyes upon that beautiful stretch of clean and polished gravel I felt that Jim had been right, and that here, if anywhere in German South-West, we should find the " big stones " in plenty.

For this mile-long beach looked like a vast débris heap of all the fancy pebbles the " new - chum " digger usually collects during his first month or so on the River Diggings : striped agates of all shades, jaspers, cornelians, chalcedonies, and above all the yellow-and-black striped banded ironstone, *bandtoms* of the digger.

And along that most disappointing beach we searched day after day, always hoping and expecting to find, and always in vain. We tried the larger-graded pebbles farther from the water first, hoping for Cullinans or at least Koh-i-noors, and by degrees we worked down to the water's edge, where the grit was but little coarser than that of Luderitzbucht ; but all to no avail.

We sank prospecting-pits 5 or 6 feet in depth at regular intervals, always finding the same promising material, always getting the same disappointing result. We turned over the big stones by hand, we " gravitated " the small stuff by sieve, as we had learnt to do years before ; there were no diamonds there.

The sun flayed us, for the heat during the day was terrific, and the nights were correspondingly cold and damp with the heavy sea fog, that came down always towards morning. We grudged ourselves time for food and sleep, so obsessed were we with the idea that the diamonds *must* be there somewhere.

Moreover, the little food we did get was of bad quality, and the water abominable. A good deal of knocking about South Africa had inured me to drinking bad water—alkaline, stagnant, full of animalcules, etc.—but this stuff was different, and I soon found that Jim had been right when he had protested that the coffee-pot was not generally used for seal oil. It was not the pot that the taste came from, it was the water itself. Every beaker, every cask, every drum, every utensil was impregnated with oil, there was absolutely no getting away from it. And yet so soaked in the same unctuous, all-pervading liquid were the three sealers that they could not taste it; in fact, they could not understand my own and Du Toit's repugnance to drinking it, in the least! But to me, as water, this liquid was quite undrinkable, as coffee I swallowed it with an effort and kept it down with a greater one, and as tea I never had the pluck to try it more than once.

One morning, after an exceptionally heavy fog, a drop or two of water percolating through the bucksail and falling on my nose not only awakened me, but gave me a brilliant idea. "What an ass!" I thought, as I jumped up there and then. "Why, I could have had a pint or two of rain-water every day had I thought of it!" I cleared out with a dipper and pail, and sure enough there was quite a pint of water caught in the slack of the sail. And I scooped it out, and raked the embers together, and put my own tin "billy" on to boil and promised myself a cup of tea made with pure water, not oil! And I went and woke Du Toit and told him, and he came and sat by the fire to watch me brew it. Of course we'd no milk, but we had sugar, and I poured out two "beakers" (enamelled mugs) of it, and set them to cool. Du Toit was in a hurry; he blew his. "Smells good," he said, and took a big gulp.

"Scalded you a bit, eh?" I asked, as I noticed the tears come to his eyes in a valiant attempt to swallow what he'd supped. He nodded, didn't seem to trust his voice somehow! Then I took mine, first

pouring it from cup to cup to cool it, and taking a mighty draught " at one fell swoop." . . . As soon afterwards as I was able I went over to Jim and roused him gently but firmly. " Jim," I asked, " how did you make this bucksail waterproof ? " " Oh ! " he replied enthusiastically, " she's a real good 'un is that bucksail ! I took a lot of trouble with her. Soaked her in paraffin first of all, then went over her with raw linseed oil. She still leaked a bit, and a feller at the whaling-station at Saldanha Bay gave me some whale oil for her, and I soaked that into her. Then, when I heard what you fellows wanted up here, I bunged some good old seal oil into her, and now she'd take a lot of beating ! "

And " she " would have—for she tasted of all the lot—I haven't forgotten that tea yet !

We spent ten days incessantly searching the gravel, and at length gave it up in despair. Jim advised us that we had only about water enough for six days, and, bad as it was, we knew we could not do without it, and the only question was whether to return to Luderitzbucht, or to try our luck at another place a lot farther up the coast. One of the Scandinavians suggested the latter. He said he had been there but once, but that the gravel was identical with that we had been trying. Only there was much more of it. It was a long way off, however, somewhere near Cape Cross, north of Walfish Bay and Swakopmund, and if we decided to go we should have to call at Walfish Bay for water. But, Jim continued, we were nearer the latter place than Luderitzbucht, the wind would probably be more in our favour ; and we voted *en masse* for these fresh fields. Before sailing, however, Du Toit and I went about four miles inland into the dunes to an extremely high and prominent one, a real sand-mountain about 200 feet high, from which we hoped to get a view of the sandy wastes generally, as we had still a lingering hope that we might yet find a similar deposit to that of Kolman's Kop, with plenty of small stones, even though we could not find the big ones.

From this huge, bare dune—the sand on the crest of which lay piled for the crowning 10 feet in an almost sheer wall—we had a fine panorama of the terrible waterless waste surrounding us, treeless, bare, and horrible in the glaring sun, awful in its featureless monotony of huge wave after wave of verdureless sand. Away south, in the far distance, we could see higher land near the coast, probably "Sylvia's Heights," and inland, faintest of faint cobalt against the glare, the outline of a long range of mountains, between which and the farthest distinguishable sand-dunes danced a lake of shimmering mirage, seldom absent in these wide spaces of the desert. Here and there, among the long ridges of the dunes, spaces could be noted which appeared to be covered with low bush, and towards one of these "pans" I made my way, whilst Du Toit struck out for a similar one in an opposite direction. The going was extremely difficult, for the dunes here lay in long parallel lines, very close together, very high and steep, and naturally with very deep corresponding valleys between; and my way lay across them. The distance appeared nothing, but each successive dune I climbed seemed to bring me no nearer the pan I was aiming for, and which was only visible for a second or two as I reached the crest of each big sand-wave. Anything more tedious than this crossing of the bare dunes it is impossible to imagine, though slower progress might conceivably be made in an attempt to cross a closely built city by climbing up, over and down the houses instead of using the streets.

However, I reached the pan at last and found it to be an oval-shaped "floor," strewn thickly with water-worn pebbles and quite free from sand. Scattered bush grew here and there upon it, and near the centre I saw larger trees growing. These I found to be tall thorn-trees, called locally *kameel doorn*, a species of thorny acacia which is usually found in or near watercourses; and at this time of the year they were covered with little yellow balls of bloom, scenting the air deliciously with the smell of cowslips.

And here, in the middle of this sea of dunes, they lined a watercourse, and though it was bone-dry, there was evidence that at one time a considerable quantity of water had flowed there. Many of the larger trees, the girth of a man, were dead, and much larger blackened stumps were plentiful. This dry watercourse disappeared under the sand-dunes at either end of the pan, and a closer inspection of the whole extent of the latter showed that it was the remaining trace of what had at one time undoubtedly been the wide bed of a river of considerable extent, of which the narrow tree-lined watercourse in the centre had been the last surviving trickle. Later, I found many of these beds among the dunes, all choked with sand and long dead and extinct, but showing indisputably that this country was not always the waterless desert it is to-day. In some cases water still flows deep in their sand-choked beds, and can be obtained by digging.

An hour or two spent in this spot convinced me that there were no diamonds to be picked up, and I turned back coastwards, after being rejoined by Du Toit. He had been to a similar pan still farther inland, and his conclusion had been that of myself, that it formed part of an ancient river-bed overwhelmed and choked by the dunes. He also said that from a high dune there, through his glasses, he had seen a very much wider expanse of country of a similar nature through a break in the dunes inland, and that it had appeared to be quite thickly wooded. He had also seen moving objects in that direction, but whether gemsbok or cattle he could not say. At any rate it was apparently an oasis, and quite possibly the "Hottentots' Paradise" we had heard so much about. At least, so thought Du Toit. "But it's a long way, and the dunes seem to get worse in that direction. It would take us a day and a half to reach it; that means we'd have to take water for three days, for we could not depend on finding water there. And if it is the place, there are a lot of well-armed Hottentots there, and we've no



DRIFTWOOD ON THE DESOLATE BEACH NEAR CAPE VOLTAS.
The low point in the distance.



PROSPECTING PARTY NEARING THE MOUNTAIN OF RICHTERSFELDT. NAMAQUALAND.

rifles, and we've no trade goods to barter with. No, it's not worth the risk ; but, man, if the yarns we've heard are true, there must be piles of diamonds there ! "

So we turned our backs reluctantly on that unknown oasis—which may indeed have been no oasis at all, and nothing more than a big pan similar to those we had examined—and toiled back to the coast.

No matter how good a walker a man may be in the ordinary way, he will find the first few days' walking in the dunes a most painful and exhausting experience. Wading through loose sand up to the ankle, climbing up it at a steep angle, and plunging down it on the other side of the dune, only to repeat the process, *ad infinitum*, exercise a terrific strain upon muscles scarcely called into play in ordinary walking ; and ten miles a day across country like this is a severe strain upon a new hand at the game. With practice, of course, he can do double, and with experience he falls into a peculiar shuffling gait which is the most noticeable feature about the farmer and others who dwell in these sandy districts and who are nicknamed " Zand-trappers." All of which Du Toit imparted to me as we walked back to the coast.

" You lift your feet too high," he said, " like these blooming Germans do when they're goose-stepping. Walk like this."

I told him I should be sorry to, and he appeared annoyed ; but I found that, though I could beat him easily on the hard flat, I stood no chance with him in the sand, and what I had always put down to bunions or sore feet was really this " zand-trapping " gait that he had acquired in his youth, and never got rid of. Most men who live among the sand wear low *veldtschoens*, without socks. These *schoen* are easily kicked off and emptied of their accumulation of sand periodically ; whilst many adopt the practice of cutting a small hole in the sole near the toe, through which they occasionally shake out the dusty contents. Ordinary boots last but very little time, as the sand has an extraordinary abrading action

upon the leather, cutting the stitching holding sole and upper together in a few days.

We got back and told Jim about what we had seen, and he put finality to the matter by declaring that if we were mad enough to try to reach the oasis we could walk back to Luderitzbucht with the diamonds, as he'd be "somethinged" if he'd wait for us! Moreover, he'd packed everything on to the cutter, and if we wanted to beat up to Walfish Bay and Cape Cross we'd better get on board at once.

I had hoped for a good night's rest that night, but instead, like a lamb to the slaughter, I was led to that wretched cutter, where again, to a modified extent, what Jim called my "sleeping-sickness" floored me. However, this time the weather was fine and the breeze was fair, and two days later we ran into Walfish Bay.

A magnificent stretch of water, perfectly protected from the prevailing winds, and capable of accommodating an enormous fleet, it is certainly the key of the huge German hinterland; and it was a very far-seeing policy on the part of England not only to secure it for herself, but to hold tight to it against all the wiles and blandishments of German diplomacy.

For had England given it up, the Germans would have undoubtedly transformed it into a most powerful naval base, which would have been not only a menace to the Cape mail route, but to all British possessions farther south, and would incidentally have forced the maintenance of a powerful fleet at or near the Cape.

Important as the place is strategically, however, England (or rather Cape Colony, of which it forms an integral part) has done little to develop this small slice of territory. A fairly good pier and a few forlorn-looking corrugated-iron buildings looking as though they had been dumped down, forgotten and deserted, constitute the settlement, which stands forlornly on the bare sand.

A resident magistrate, a few born-tired officials, a "hotel"- and store-keeper—in all a handful of the

slackest white people I ever saw—constituted the population. The condensing gear on which they relied principally for water was out of repair, which (according to Jim's remarks about it) appeared to be its normal state ; and here we had to wait four days before we could fill our miscellaneous collection of water " tanks."

CHAPTER III

THE NAMIEB DESERT, "SAM-PANS"—CAPE CROSS—SWAKOPMUND—WINDHUK.

MEANWHILE a local acquaintance of Jim's asked Du Toit and me to go with him a day's journey up the Khuisiep River, to a place in the Namieb Desert, where he believed that tin existed, and I jumped at the opportunity. We had good horses and travelled light, with a few roster-kooks and some biltong by way of provisions, and a water-bottle each. Riding south from the forlorn-looking settlement, we followed the thin line of vegetation denoting the river-bed, which, when it contains water, empties itself into the lagoon terminating the southern extremity of the bay. Thence, striking inland, the bed widens till it becomes a long stretch of wooded country offering the most striking contrast to the barren desert and sandhills that hem it in on either side. But, in spite of the thick verdure and fine trees, there is no water to be met with along the whole route, except immediately after rains, and at one or two spots where pits have been sunk.

What a treat those trees were, though! The eye, aching with the red-hot glare of a whole landscape of bare, scorching sand, turned to their beautiful greenery with a wonderful sense of rest and relief.

Most of them were varieties of acacia, *cameel doorn*, such as I have described, and others covered with huge, bean-like pods, and most striking among them were fine, majestic trees resembling big oaks in outline, and giving the whole well-wooded expanse a beautiful park-like aspect.

There was plenty of welcome shade, especially from a smaller but thicker-leaved tree of a variety

of wattle ; grass and creeping plants made a verdant carpet, butterflies flitted about among brilliant flowers, and bright-plumaged birds called to each other in the trees. In fact, to us, fresh from sand and sea and "sleeping-sickness," it was Paradise. And I said so to Du Toit as we off-saddled for a bite at midday, knee-haltering our ponies and taking our snack under the shade of a big mimosa. I said to him, "Let's stop here ! Anyway, if we find diamonds or tin, let's stop here ! What can we want more ? Green trees, birds, flowers, grass, shade for the seeking, water for the digging ! This is Paradise, and it's good enough for me. I'm going to sleep."

And I did, Du Toit, with unwonted consideration, offering to keep an eye on the horses, and wake me when it was time to trek again. But I did not sleep long. I awoke with the pleasant sensation of being stabbed all over with red-hot needles. One eye was too swollen to work, but the other advised me of the fact that it was not needles that were troubling me, but a small yet most iniquitous insect that had sampled me before in other sandy parts, but that, in my delight at the beautiful trees and beautiful shade, I had forgotten. This was the "sam-pan." I had seen him before, but this time I had evidently found him at home, where he lived ! He was all over me—a small, pernicious infliction ranging in size from a pin's-head to a shirt-button, flat, almost circular in shape, and with legs all around his perimeter. Entomology is not my strong point, but that's how he looks, and he feels as though he had a mouth on each foot. And in this case he had caught me just as he might have caught the most abject greenhorn : lying asleep in the shade of a tree where there were obvious signs that cattle, or big buck, had been in the habit of standing.

These horrible little pests are one of the biggest scourges of the desert. They are a species of tick that breed in the droppings of animals, and burrow in the sand of the immediate vicinity, lying low till some juicy, full-blooded victim comes along for

them to perform upon. For this reason they are always plentiful under certain shady trees, favoured by oxen and big game as a resting-place in the heat of the day. Choose one of these spots and sit down in the pleasant shade and watch the sand around you. Not a sign of insect life for the first few minutes —and then! A tiny eruption in the sand near your elbow, and there, scratching his way to daylight— and you—comes the pioneer, followed by others till the whole earth is alive with them. And bite! So poisonous are they to some people that to be bitten badly leads to blood-poisoning, and in any case the intolerable itching from their bites spoils a man for sleep or anything else but scratching and inventing new profanity for days and days after he has been victimised. All of which I had known, and still Du Toit and his companion in crime had caught me beautifully, with the enticing shade of that big tree. They lay sleeping peacefully, a bare twenty yards away, under a bush thick enough to shade them and too small to have harboured oxen—or sam-pans.

We followed the Khuisiep till late that evening, when we came to a waterhole where our horses drank, and near which we slept that night, not too near, for the immediate vicinity was literally buzzing with mosquitoes. The stagnant water was also full of their larvæ—so full that we strained it through a handkerchief before boiling a billy of it for coffee, and got a spoonful of larvæ to each billy. Still it was quite drinkable as coffee, much better than the oleaginous liquid Jim provided us with.

The following morning we left the Khuisiep and turned up a tributary watercourse (dry) coming from the desert eastward; a few miles up which we left the sand behind and came into rocky, broken country, sterile and quite without vegetation. Here there were many outcrops of granite, and in certain parts of the dry stream-bed garnets were lying by the bucketful. They were a constituent of the granite, but in many instances had been mistaken for ruby tin. Black titaniferous iron-sand also abounded in

this stream-bed, and in many of the small quartz reefs large crystals of jet-black tourmaline were to be seen—some of them huge specimens as thick as one's wrist. Unfortunately, real prospecting was out of the question, as we had neither tins nor tools; but the country is a most interesting one, and it is quite possible that some day a valuable discovery of tin may be made there. Want of water—that great handicap to prospecting in South Africa—prevented us even "panning" the river-bed; but certain sand and gravel, which I took back to the nearest water that night and panned there, yielded both tin and copper, and a fine "tail" of gold. This spot was just over the border of British territory, but the unnamed river apparently came from the mountains, plainly visible in German territory eastward. Our trip back was uneventful, and we arrived at Walfish Bay the following evening, where we solved the water question and found Jim ready to start. Before doing so I indulged in the extravagance of purchasing a small cask for water for my own use; a procedure that called forth such an amount of elaborate sarcasm from Jim and Co. that I soon regretted it, more so as I found on broaching it that the contents tasted as strongly of tar as the other had done of oil.

Again the cutter had favourable winds, and this time neither Du Toit nor myself was seasick, a fact Jim commented upon most ungraciously, as he said we took up less room and were far less in the way when suffering from "sleeping-sickness" than we were doing now we thought we were sailors. There's no pleasing some people!

We landed at a spot some seventy miles up the coast, and not far distant from Cape Cross, where Diego Cam, one of John of Portugal's intrepid old navigators, placed a *padrão*, or stone cross, when he first landed there in 1460 or thereabouts. This cross, from which the Cape takes its name, has long since disappeared, but according to Jim the sculptured socket in which it was set can still be seen on

a prominent point of the rock. Probably it was the only part of the monument that the early souvenir-hunters could not take away with them.

However, much as I wished to see it, we did not get to Cape Cross that journey. We landed in a little cave within a short walk of the beach we were in search of, a beach identical with that one we had prospected lower down the coast, and which yielded identical results. We searched it for a week and found no diamonds.

Moreover we wandered inland, for the interior here, though barren and inhospitable, did not present the difficulties of the huge sand-dunes we had encountered lower down. Flat sandy wastes there were, devoid of vegetation, but easily traversed, and these were also broken by frequent barren kopjes, whilst but a few miles inland we saw high, flat-topped mountains. In many of the dry water-courses and on certain spots on the sand-flats we found likely-looking gravel, but never any diamonds, and at the end of ten days we decided to return to Swakopmund, from whence we could pick up a steamer to Luderitzbucht. Jim suggested this course to us, whilst offering, if we so wished, to carry out his original offer to land us there himself. " But," said he, " if you're not keen on it, I'll just drop you at Swakopmund, where you'll get a boat easier than you would at Walfish Bay. We've got something else on up here that might be worth our while —if you really are not keen ! " We quite fell in with Jim's view, for we neither of us relished beating back against headwinds all the way to Luderitzbucht in the cutter ; besides, Jim had proved himself a white man right through, and we didn't want to stand in the way of that mysterious " something else " he had on. We never asked him what it was, but some funny things could be told about those sealing cutters' doings along the coast in those days —when none of them were particularly keen about the German Customs regulations ! Well, good luck to Jim and his "crew" anyway—they were good sorts!

So they landed us at Swakopmund, and before leaving again Jim told us that he expected to be back in Luderitzbucht in about a month, and, if we were still there and cared to do it, he would take us down to a place not far north of the Orange River mouth where he had heard diamonds had been picked up.

But our late experience had shaken our faith in promising-looking gravel patches, and so we omitted to follow up this clue, which, as events proved later, might very probably have led us to discover the famous and fabulously rich Pomona fields. So, with a vague promise to meet again somewhere, we parted from Jim, who cleared away up the coast—ostensibly at least—on his mysterious errand, and whom I never saw again.

The officials at Swakopmund were both surly and suspicious, but luckily our papers were in order, and we could show sufficient funds to satisfy the immigration authorities; and as we found we should have to wait ten days for a steamer, we decided to run up to the capital, Windhuk, after first having a good look round Swakopmund and the immediate vicinity. Disappointed in their efforts to obtain the country's natural port at Walfish Bay, the Germans had done their best to construct a harbour at Swakopmund, which is really the mouth of the Swakop, or more correctly "Tsoachaub" river. This river, in common with all others of this country, only flows during the summer months, but water can be obtained in abundance almost all along its course by digging in the sand. From a few miles inland its banks are covered with vegetation, and indeed these long dry river oases are a frequent and pleasant feature of this part of the Protectorate.

Although large sums of money must have been spent upon the attempt at a harbour at Swakopmund, it appears to be a very qualified success. There is a stone jetty that offers some protection to tugs in fine weather, but ships have to lie in the roadstead, and when the prevailing gales are blowing landing is both difficult and dangerous. The township boasts

quite a number of good buildings, and is a credit to the orderly ideas of German officialism. A good deal of ore was being brought down by rail from Otavi, a copper-mine some 250 miles north-west, connected by a 2-feet gauge line. This and the landing of a tremendous amount of army stores, waggons, and artillery made the port quite a busy one. And an Englishman whom we met at the hotel told us that the amount of stores landed during the latter part of the recent Hottentot and Herero rebellion had been enormous, and that depôts were being built all over the country inland to allow of their storage. Considering that the two races were practically wiped out at the time peace was declared, it is difficult to understand what all these stores and munitions of war are needed for.

We went to Windhuk on the third day, a slow and tedious journey of 237 miles which took us over twenty-four hours to accomplish.

At Swakopmund the coastal sand-belt is at its narrowest, a short run of a few miles taking one clear of the dune region ; thence the country, though sterile, is broken and hilly, and the line gradually ascends towards the plateau that forms the interior. Here the scenery—after the awful monotony of the sandy wastes near the coast—was interesting and in places not without beauty ; hill and plain, mountain and river-bed, succeeding each other, and the latter, though dry, being in most cases extremely well wooded. Many of the mountains are lofty, and most of them are table-topped. Windhuk is a pretty place. Lying nearly 5,000 feet above sea-level, it is built in a rocky plain surrounded by hilly and picturesque country. Vegetation is abundant, as the rainfall is good ; moreover, there is an abundance of water, mostly obtained from thermal springs in the hills to the north of the settlement. There are five of these hot springs, ranging in temperature from tepid up to nearly boiling-point, and many of the houses have this water laid on in pipes. It is also used when cold for irrigating gardens, etc., but in



THE TERRIBLE DESOLATION OF BARREN, RIVEN ROCK BELOW THE GREAT FALLS.

addition there are cold springs that issue from the limestone of the valley below.

Boring has also produced water at no great depth wherever it has been attempted, and as in the rainy season (January to April) the rainfall varies from 15 to 20 inches, it can readily be seen that Windhuk, and in fact most of the neighbouring portion of Damaraland, is by no means badly off in that respect.

As in Swakopmund, the principal houses, public buildings, etc., were all new and well built, and the place was then rapidly growing; and with a good climate, and green trees everywhere, Windhuk is likely to become a most pleasant abiding-place.

Between the hills north of Windhuk there is a smaller settlement known as Klein Windhuk, which is situated in a very fertile valley, where vegetables and fruit are grown in abundance. Should some means be found for conserving the water which flows away in such abundance during the summer months, this and many similar valleys are well suited for the growing of mealies and lucerne, for which there is apparently a very great demand.

Windhuk was at that time an important military station; in fact, the civilian population was insignificant, and the hotel was crammed with officers. Among these I met a Hauptmann, whom I will call Mülier, who was a most striking contrast to the general run of overbearing, swashbuckling officers. He spoke English well and was most courteous and affable, especially when he learnt that I knew something of geology. He had just returned from a trip south to the Gibeon district, and he showed me some samples of excellent "blue ground"—Kimberlite—he had found there. He badly wanted me to return with him and prospect the place, but as I had made all arrangements to return to Luderitzbucht and Cape Town, I could not do so. And much to my regret, for his theory that these were the pipes from which the coastal deposits of diamonds had come originally was not as far-fetched as it appeared at first; for he explained it by a theory of glacial

denudation of such pipes in the remote past, and said there was abundant evidence everywhere that such action had taken place, and that the glaciers had travelled from north-east to south-west right across the country to the sea.

As I could not go, I suggested to Du Toit to do so, but this he would not do, as he got on with the Germans worse than I did ; in fact, if they treated me with scant courtesy, they treated Du Toit with none !

These Germans profess to despise the Boers, and many of the latter who fled into German territory rather than accept British rule after the Boer War had been very glad to return to the protection of the Union Jack.

Meanwhile Hauptmann Müller very kindly lent me a horse and took me round the settlement, talking incessantly the while of the future of the Protectorate, of which he had a great opinion. He had been in the Cape Colony and Transvaal, and spoke with admiration not unmixed with envy of our rich mines and splendid resources.

" We came late," he said ; " you English had all the good land. But now we have diamonds and copper here, and when the Protectorate pays we will develop the country—that is, if we have not fought you before then." For this refreshing man made no secret of his belief that war between England and Germany was inevitable. " You English have the pick of the world," he said, " but you cannot keep it ! You have no army, and we are building a navy that will equal your own. And when ' The Day ' comes we shall smash you up and take what we want, and you will decline into a little second-rate Power. We must do so ; you cannot confine us to Europe and the waste places of the earth."

He told me that a toast I had heard in the hotel was being drunk all over the German Empire, and that every officer longed for the war. " It means their chance, it means promotion to them," he explained ; " your Empire is declining, it has seen its

day; and now comes Germany's." We parted perfectly good friends, and I certainly preferred his impudent frankness to the scowls and surly demeanour of most of his compatriots.

Returning to Swakopmund, we caught the *Frieda Woermann* back to Luderitzbucht, and in that comfortable little liner had a very different trip from the one we had experienced in Jim's cutter. At that time the skipper of this well-known coast boat was an enormously fat man, and his chief engineer was built on the same lines, and it was a standing joke, whenever they happened to appear on deck together, for the passengers to rush in mock panic to the opposite side of the ship, with the avowed intention of balancing her and keeping her from capsizing. But they were a very harmless, good-natured old pair, and played *scart* interminably.

Luderitzbucht was still prospecting-mad, but apparently no new discoveries had been made of any great importance, and new regulations were being promulgated at such a rate, and such restrictions were being placed upon diggers and prospectors, that men were beginning to leave the country. So frequent and so contradictory had been these new regulations, that it had often happened that men who had been absent on a pegging expedition for a week or two would return to find that the new laws rendered all their work useless. In short, there appeared very little scope for us there; and after one or two abortive trips to spots we had heard of, and which we found to be useless or already pegged, we decided to return to British territory.

We were strengthened in this resolve by what we heard from a relative of Du Toit's: a certain Stuurmann, who had been in German employ during the whole of the Hottentot rebellion, and was one of the many Dutch transport-drivers living in the Boer camp just outside Luderitzbucht. This chap had at one time followed the Orange River from its mouth up to the Great Falls, and the account he gave of certain spots on its banks, and notably of huge

stretches of gravel near the Great Fish River mouth, made us all eagerness to get there as soon as possible. The description of these gravels tallied, it is true, with the blank patches we had gone so far after, but in this case, we argued, they were near that possible source, the Vaal River Diggings; and though we had followed similar patches in vain from Prieska down to below the Great Falls, there remained this 150 miles of the almost unknown lower reaches, and they had always appealed to us!

Moreover, Stuurmann said that in places he had noticed innumerable bright crystals sparkling in the gravel there, and had never even picked them up, as in those days he had had no thought of diamonds. At any rate, here was a place where a prospecting party would not be handicapped by being followed by "claim-jumpers," as was happening here at Luderitzbucht, or have to contend with constantly changing mining laws; besides, there were no Germans there, and that appealed to us almost as much as the diamonds! But a properly organised expedition would be necessary, and to arrange this we decided to return to Cape Town first.

This Stuurmann was a most interesting man to talk to; he had been all through the Hottentot campaign, and had the greatest contempt for the fighting power of the Germans. Towards the latter end of the campaign, he said, they had begun to learn a little and adapt themselves to the conditions the country demanded of them; but even so he (Stuurmann) considered that with a good commando of burghers he would take German South-West from them any day! And this was the opinion of his mates, between whom and the Germans there was very little love lost; though to be but just, their employers, the Government, paid these Boer transport-drivers extremely well.

Stuurmann also gave me much interesting detail as to the terrible treatment meted out to the unfortunate natives, both Herero and Hottentot, who were unlucky enough to fall into the hands of the Germans.

I had seen something of this myself, and had heard more from ex-German soldiers themselves, who with extraordinary callousness used to show whole series of illustrated postcards, depicting wholesale executions and similar gruesome doings to death of these poor natives. One of these, that enjoyed great vogue at the time, showed a line of ten Hottentots dangling from a single gallows, some still standing on the packing-cases with a noose round their necks, waiting for the soldiers to kick their last standing-place away ; some kicking and writhing in the death struggle, for the short drop did not break their necks, but only strangled them slowly, and one having a German soldier hanging on to his legs to finish the work more quickly. And each and every German soldier in the photo was striking an attitude and smirking towards the camera in pleasurable anticipation of the fine figure he would cut when the photo was published. This, I repeat, was only one of many that enjoyed a big sale in German South-West for the delectation of admiring friends in the Fatherland. Absolutely no mercy was shown to these unfortunate creatures : they were made to dig big graves, and were shot down by the hundreds beside them, whilst practically the whole remnant of both races who escaped this fate were exterminated in the detention-camps at Luderitzbucht and Swakopmund. Towards the end of the long, dragging war, the Germans conceived the plan of sending Herero prisoners captured in the north for internment to Luderitzbucht, where they were strangers to the country and where escape was hopeless, whilst the Hottentots captured in the south were sent north to Swakopmund.

There is a small low-lying promontory in Luderitz Bay known as Shark Island, and here the Herero prisoners were crowded in thousands, shelterless, with no proper supply of food or water : and here, huddled together like penguins, they died like flies.

Often on a blazing day, such as is common in Luderitzbucht, they received no water whatever,

either having been forgotten, or the supply having failed ; the food (?) supplied them was never sufficient for a tithe of them, and they often fought like wild animals and killed each other to obtain it. There were also a large number caged in a wire enclosure on the beach ; these were slightly better off, as, although they received no rations from the military in charge of them, a few of their number were let out each morning and went ravenously foraging in the refuse-buckets, bringing what offal they could back to their starving fellow-prisoners. Cold—for the nights are often bitterly cold there—hunger, thirst, exposure, disease, and madness claimed scores of victims every day, and cartloads of their bodies were every day carted over to the back beach, buried in a few inches of sand at low tide, and as the tide came in the bodies went out, food for the sharks.

Now, Stuurmann and the other men who told me these things were no negrophiles (a Boer as a rule has an excellent idea as to how to keep a native in his place as the white man's inferior), but so terrible had been the treatment of these natives by the Germans that even these case-hardened transport-drivers spoke of what they had seen with the utmost horror and abhorrence. Yet these men are looked down upon as an inferior race by the Germans, who themselves, as far as the troops and officials in German South-West are concerned, are utterly devoid of all humanity when dealing with natives. I saw much of the trait myself later ; it is unpleasant and distasteful, and bodes but ill for the future relations of white and black in the German colonies.

I was by no means sorry to leave Luderitzbucht, for during the whole of this brief stay it blew incessantly and the air was a sort of semi-solid mixture of whirling sand, that cut and stung, and choked and blinded, and permeated every orifice and crevice, and generally made life utterly unbearable. When this prevailing wind reaches a certain violence, the whole country practically gets up and walks, big sand-dunes shift along and others come after them,

like the waves of a slowly moving sea ; wide stretches of hard land are denuded of every grain of sand, and others buried deep in it, and it is a curious fact that these storms actually blow diamonds ! A claim deep with diamondiferous sand has often been swept clean of its contents in a few hours ; sand, gravel, and diamonds being lifted up and borne away, to be deposited in some more favoured spot. Even the big dunes of a hundred feet or so in height are not stationary ; though their movement is slower, it is none the less sure. In many instances these huge sand-waves have passed slowly but irresistibly over strongly built dwellings and the like, burying them completely for a time, and gradually passing onward and re-disclosing them. . . .

We came down the coast in the *Hellopes*, an alleged passenger-boat that rolled like a hog and smelt like its sty ; and we were both very glad to see Cape Town again.

CHAPTER IV

MORE DIAMOND RUMOURS—PROSPECTING IN A MOTOR-CAR—VAN RYN'S DORP—PROSPECTING IN EARNEST—A PATRIARCH—NEWS OF BUSHMAN'S PARADISE.

In Cape Town I found rumours of new diamond deposits were as rife as they had been in German territory, and had scarcely rubbed the Luderitzbucht sand from my eyes before I was called upon to go and verify a new "discovery," this time much nearer home.

By this time the craze had so spread that people were arguing that, as diamonds were found in sand at Luderitzbucht, the sands all up the coast might be full of them, and wild and indiscriminate pegging was going on all over the place.

Amongst other local syndicates, one had been formed for the purpose of investigating certain deposits alleged to still remain undiscovered on both the German coast and our own, which spots were only known to the promoter. The "plum" of these spots was an alleged deposit of "blue ground" which the discoverer claimed to have found many years before at a wild part of our own coast, when landing from a sealing cutter. The exact locality was kept a dead secret, but when, one fine morning, the papers blossomed forth with the alleged discovery of diamonds near Lambert's Bay, about 150 miles north-west of Cape Town, the owner of the map declared that it was near enough to his "discovery" to render instant action necessary.

Within a few hours the syndicate had sent for me, and the same day four of us were jammed into a small motor-car *en route* for the spot. "Take nothing but what you stand in," ordered the owner (and driver); "we shall be back in four days!"

Cars were few and primitive in those days, and the roads we had to traverse were as primitive as the car. For a long time the owner of the map would not show it, or give more than a vague notion of where we were bound; but eventually Malmesbury and Eendekuil, then the terminus of the railway in that direction, were left behind; we climbed the difficult pass of "Pickaneer's Kloof" and spent the first night dragging the rudimentary car through the sand-drifts below Macgregor's Pass. We broke down hopelessly at red-hot little Clanwilliam, hearing to our dismay that there was another ahead on the same errand, and after maddening delay splashed on again, in pouring rain, through a terrible track leading to Van Ryn's Dorp, along the steep mountain slopes skirting the Olifants River. The four days we allotted for the whole trip were taken up in reaching Van Ryn's Dorp, a remote little village on the road to Namaqualand, and where our car created a mild sensation, for it was the first to be seen there. Away to the right of the dorp towered a magnificent isolated table-mountain, its reddish sides as sheer as gigantic walls.

The sun was just setting, and I shall never forget the marvellous effect upon the huge buttresses of "Matsie-Kamma," as the mountain is called, for the towering cliffs appeared as though turned into golden molten fire, whilst over it hovered a peculiar cloud, similar to the "Tablecloth" of Table Mountain. Behind ran a long escarpment of similar flat-topped mountains, and on them the glow was rapidly fading through a whole gamut of exquisite shades between crimson, mauve, heliotrope, and purple, till on them the sun had completely set, and they stood out a cold clear indigo against the cinnamon and green of the sky.

But we had other things to think of besides mountains or sunsets: we wanted to get to our "diamonds." The car could go no farther towards the coast, but a Cape cart could, and early next morning we were off again, and, toiling through an awful track, we slept that night at the "back of beyant," the little mission station on the dreary sand-flats of Ebenezer. By

this time we had forced the "discoverer" to disclose his map, and found we had to go to the mouth of the Olifants River, cross it to the barren, waterless, almost unknown and uninhabited coast north of it and find our way to a remote sealing-station some distance up that coast.

I will not weary the reader with a recital of all the asinine things that happened before we got to the spot, but suffice it to say that at nightfall one evening, footsore, hungry, ragged, and half dead with thirst, we found the little hut where the sealers lived, a most desolate spot many miles away from drinking-water. The sealers—all coloured men—were oily and grimy to a degree, but they looked askance at us when we burst in upon them in the clothes we had left Cape Town in! Tattered, torn, dusty, covered in melkbosch-juice from the thickets we had traversed, they took us for a shipwrecked crew. It was dark by the time we had explained what we were after.

"Blue ground!" said the foreman, an European. "Yes, it's about half a mile up the coast! I'll take you to it first thing in the morning."

"So it was right, then!" we agreed. We accepted their hospitality, and, packed like sardines, tried to sleep on the floor of the hut, in an atmosphere of seal oil and rotten seals, whose huge carcasses polluted the beach for miles.

By daylight I was on the spot, peering through the raw sea-fog for the "blue ground" we had come so far to find.

It was there, cliffs of it, millions of tons of it, blue shale, utterly valueless, and, except in colour, bearing no atom of resemblance to diamondiferous "blue ground"! . . .

It took us best part of a week to get back to Cape Town, and I swore that nothing would ever induce me to try prospecting in a motor-car again!

Even our short absence had allowed of more stories coming through as to rich finds in German West; moreover, there were rumours as to the finding of

diamonds in Namaqualand at no great distance from the spot we had just returned from ; and a week or two later I set out alone, with the intention of properly prospecting the country in the vicinity of Van Ryn's Dorp, and, if needs be, northward into Namaqualand. But this time I did not go "as I stood," but with a complete and compact outfit of tent, tools, gear, and provisions for a prolonged period. These I sent ahead by waggon to Van Ryn's Dorp, following myself by post cart a fortnight later, and doing the journey in half the time and with a tithe of the discomfort I had experienced in the motor-car.

At Van Ryn's Dorp I heard the encouraging (or disquieting) news that a very finely equipped expedition had passed through a few days before, going north after diamonds, which they professed to have found on a previous trip. I therefore obtained a small donkey-waggon and team, with a coloured driver and two boys, and pushed on to Zout River, a stream running from the direction of Little Bushmanland into the Olifants, and on the banks of which some years previously a fine diamond had been found. The exact spot was at the bridge over which ran the lonely but important road to Namaqualand and the north, and from this spot my actual prospecting began. And from the first I had interest of the most absorbing : for if there is any country in the world where encouraging prospects may be found, it is in that same north-west region. The stream facilitated prospecting, it was crystal-clear, and with abundant water ; but unfortunately, as the name implies, it was salt, salt as brine and undrinkable even for the donkeys ! All along its banks there were "indications" of minerals, and all alike proved to be but "indications." Heavy gravel led to my washing systematically all along its beds for diamonds, and finding promising but baffling results in the sieve. Using a prospecting-pan for possible gold gave me similar results : here and there a tiny yellow "tail" at the end of the pan showed that gold

had been there, but all efforts to trace it to its matrix failed.

Copper there was in abundance, though in small and isolated occurrences; here and there grains of tin showed among the black titaniferous iron-sands of the river: and iron and galena were everywhere. In fact, so multitudinous were these various "indications," and so barren of tangible result was the following-up of any and all of them, that I began to realise that the description that had been applied to the north-west as being the "Land of Mineral Samples" was not much exaggerated! Still, day after day I worked along towards the Olifants, finding my results getting poorer and my water getting shorter every day. The whole region was most bewildering; it was as though the waste from a big assayer's laboratory had been dumped all along that stream, and none of the "samples" found led to anything but a big note of interrogation.

At last, in a tiny side-stream, I found some minute nuggets of gold, and my hopes rose; moreover, a native "herd" whom I chanced to come across told me that a big white reef ran right across this same stream a few miles up, and that he had always heard there was "goud" in it. So I abandoned my laborious panning and struck up the stream, and found a wide quartz reef just as he had described, but no trace was there of gold in it.

Lower down this "Zout" river I came into an astonishing region of brilliantly coloured clays and marls, ranging in colour right through the gamut of reds, yellows, and blues, as also a fine deposit of milk-white Kaolin; and these in turn gave place to high banks of a sort of volcanic mud, or ash, of a bright blue colour, through which the stream had cut a deep bed. These high banks or mounds exactly resemble the huge tailings of the Kimberley diamond-mines, both in appearance and in substance: and, indeed, this deposit is apparently analogous to Kimberlite minus its various inclusions.

I should have much liked to explore this wild and

desolate part of the country farther, but water was now our chief anxiety; moreover the land from hereabouts was private property, upon which the hampering restrictions of a prospecting licence did not give me the right to prospect "without the consent of the owner!" This owner, I found from my boys, was nothing more than a coloured man who leased the land from Government for a few pounds per annum to run his goats on; moreover he did not live on the property, but a good two days' trek away, so I did not trouble to obtain his consent. I merely mention this *en passant* to show by what absurd conditions a prospector is bound. Here was a man, absolutely ignorant of minerals, and with absolutely no right to them (for they are Crown property in such cases), and yet a miserable lease, which only granted him surface rights, still made him the arbiter as to whether a licensed prospector should set foot on his 10,000 morgen or so of land!

Of course there was no one to stop my prospecting, but had I done so and made any discovery I could not have legalised it without his consent, and being made to pay through the nose for it! The system is utterly wrong. There are millions of acres of land in the Cape Province held under such terms, the owners or lessees of which will neither put a pick in themselves nor allow the prospector to.

By this time the weather was getting bitterly cold, hoar frost lying thick every morning, and the water freezing even in my little patrol tent. And as there was no firewood obtainable, and the two "boys" were suffering badly at night, I decided to work upstream toward Little Bushmanland, as I had heard that the upper reaches of this little river had plenty of wood. So we loaded up and trekked for a day towards a "farm" rejoicing in the name of "Douse the Glim." In this direction I found wood in abundance, and the "boys" built themselves a tiny *pondhock* of boughs and branches, and by keeping a roaring fire going just outside of it all night they managed to keep from freezing.

Here we had to send the donkeys a full day's journey away for water and grazing, and had to fill our water-barrel periodically from the same place, and here—although in a comfortable camp—my luck was no better than lower down the river. Samples of all sorts, " indications " in abundance, and nothing more. Along these upper reaches, however, I found many masses of a ferruginous gravel hardened almost into conglomerate and containing a small portion of gold, but in no case sufficient to pay for working in such a remote region. These gravels are in appearance identical with certain Australian gravels which are both gold and gem bearing, and may probably have been the source of the diamond that had been found lower down, and of the gold I saw traces of. During the three weeks that I had been out; thus far, I had seen but one solitary human being except my two " boys," the herd who had told me of the gold reef ; for, although but a day's ride from Van Ryn's Dorp, the region is a very solitary and deserted one, much of the land being *brak* (alkaline) and unfit for stock to run on.

So that the life, though not without interest, was a very lonely as well as a very hard one ; so cold were the nights that the two blankets I had brought utterly failed to keep me warm even when I turned in " all standing," and I soon abandoned my canvas camp-stretcher for a warmer lair on the ground itself. Then at daybreak, Sam, the elder of the " boys," would make coffee, and with a hurried snack of food we would start off for the day, carrying pick, shovel, sieve, and pan, and food and water for midday. Thus I tried the whole of the adjacent country systematically, sieving the grounds in the stream-bed and " gravitating " them (a diamond-digger's trick) when water was sufficient, or using the prospecting-pan for the purpose of finding traces of gold or other metals.

When water failed, or the " indications " occurred far from it, small portions of the concentrates of sand and gravel would be bagged and tied up and

labelled separately, the same applying to samples of rock taken from various parts or depths of a reef. All these samples had in any case to be carried back to water, and, in the case of rock, to camp, where each portion had to be carefully pounded into the finest powder by pestle and mortar before it could be tested for the mineral it might contain—hard and laborious work, varied by drilling holes in hard rock for dynamite charges, or "gravitating" concentrates in ice-cold water till the brine cracked the hands and caused most painful sores. Then, the day's work over, sunset would often find us miles from camp, and we would trudge back, and load ourselves up with dry wood for the night's fire, and feel too tired to attempt to cook.

Boer meal was the staple food; a big three-legged pot of it boiled into steaming "pap" made an excellent breakfast, and every few days I would bake a batch of "roster kookies," little flat cakes made of the same meal with a little baking-powder to make them rise, and baked over the embers on a "roster," or gridiron. Or occasionally I allowed the "boys" to make me a big loaf similar to their own, the composition being the same, but in this case the dough was massed into a loaf shaped like a flat Dutch cheese: the embers were thrown aside and the loaf buried in the ashes, and covered deep in them. Bread thus baked is of course very hard and often burnt on the outside, but when this is cut away it is excellent.

Of fresh meat we had none, and although I gave the "boys" plenty of such luxuries as bully beef, sardines, and golden syrup, they pined for the flesh-pots of Egypt in the shape of their dearly loved sheep or goat *vleesch*. But there were no sheep in the locality; and although Sam spent the whole of a Sunday away at a farm about ten miles off, he failed to bring any meat back. The next Sunday, however, both of them cleared off in the early morning and did not return till nearly dark, when they brought in a big goat between them. Within a few minutes the head was off and buried in the ashes, and the knives

were at work cutting up a big pot of *vleesch*. Then Sam cut off a leg and brought it to me. He spoke English quite well, did Sam. "Baas," he said, "here is the *geldt*; I did not pay for this bok, he was present!" "Present!" I said, in surprise, for sheep-farmers do not usually refuse good money for their small stock. "How was that, then, Sam? Who gave you it?" "Nie," he replied; "it was an ou baas of mine, I work for him once. And this bok he little sick, so the ou baas give him for present! Baas like me cook some *vleesch* for him, now?" "No," I said, with feeling; "very good of you, Sam, but I won't deprive you of it. Little sick, was it? Well, well!"

All that night the camp sizzled and smoked, and certainly that "sick bok" smelt good! They ate his head, baked in the ashes; they ate a big potful of boiled *vleesch*, and promptly put in another; they cut strips of him and broiled them on the embers, his internal arrangements frizzled and smoked and were devoured by the yard. I had my cold bully beef to the accompaniment of a really most appetising smell, smoked a pipe and turned in, and still they ate on. Whether they ate all night I cannot say, but certainly, when I woke again in the morning, they still sat there eating, and the remains of the "bok" looked very sick indeed.

At length I became convinced that, whatever might exist in this wild district, diamonds certainly did not, and I determined to make a flying trip to the north-east, towards the long escarpment of mountains that stretched all along the horizon in that direction, and which was apparently the watershed from which the various rivers and streams of the country (now mostly dry) had had their source.

There were no roads in the right direction, and the country was too rugged to allow of using the cart, so I determined to "hump my swag." Leaving one man in camp, I took Sam with me, and we carried food for six days (kookies, biltong, and the like), a small trenching tool, sieve and pan, a canvas bag



T'SAMMA IN THE DUNES.



IN THE HEART OF THE SOUTHERN KALAHARI.

and water-bottle and a blanket. Even this minimum of necessities meant at least 50 lb. weight for each man, and was more than was comfortable for such rough country and long distances as we were bent on covering; but it was our only chance of visiting a certain valley where again diamonds were supposed to exist, and which I had set my heart on visiting. We found, as is usual in such cases, that the mountains seemed to recede as we progressed, and although we did a good fifteen miles before night, we appeared very little nearer them. During the whole day we saw no human being, though we saw sheep once on the flank of a kopje: nor did we find a drop of water the whole distance, much of which was up the courses of dried-up streams.

About sunset we were lucky enough to find a few trees flanking one of these latter; and, making a wind-break of bushes and a big fire, we tried to make ourselves comfortable for the night. Luckily the spot was sandy, and we scooped a sort of bed in it that looked unpleasantly like a grave, and was within roasting distance of the fire; and with plenty of dry wood at arm's reach, and my one blanket well tucked round me, I fell asleep almost immediately. I woke up about an hour later with my blanket smouldering on one side of me, whilst my other side was apparently frost-bitten. A wind had sprung up and was blowing sparks and embers all over me, whilst Sam snored peacefully and in safety on the other side. Whilst I was making new arrangements, I was startled by a man stepping into the firelight. He was a poor tatterdemalion of a Hottentot, clothed in nothing but a few rags, and literally blue with cold and famished with hunger. I woke the reluctant Sam, and he made a billy of coffee, part of which warmed the poor shivering wretch enough to enable him to talk. He spoke but a few words of Dutch, but Sam understood his "click" language and interpreted. He said he had been working for a prospecting party a long day's trek to the north, but had "earned enough," and was on his

way back to Calvinia, where he belonged. He had expected to find *trek boeren* at some old water-pits an hour or two north of where we were, but found the " pits " dry and the place deserted. And with the usual improvidence of a native, he had eaten all his food and drunk all his water before he got there, and would certainly have had a bad time had he not seen our fire. I questioned him about the prospecting party, who apparently were the men I had heard of in Van Ryn's Dorp. " Yes," he said, " they were looking for ' blink klippers ' (bright stones) in a sand river, and finding them too, lots of them."

What with this piece of news, and the cold, and the dodging of sparks and embers made necessary by a change of wind about every half an hour, I rested very little that night.

In the morning I gave the Hottentot a plug of tobacco and a little of our precious water, for he informed us we should find some about an hour farther on in the direction we were going, and he set out quite light-heartedly on his eighty-mile tramp " home." He was literally " as he stood," an old battered tin water-bottle appeared to be his only possession ; but he had some money tied up in his rags, and offered to buy some more of my coveted plug *tabaki*, which I could not spare him.

Few of these Ishmaelite Hottentots can be prevailed upon to work for any length of time ; a week or two, and they want the few shillings due to them, and away they trek to the nearest dorp, be it even 150 miles away, where mouth-organs, tobacco, golden syrup, or other delicacies dear to the native soon account for their little hard-earned cash. Seldom indeed do they buy a blanket or make any provision for the cold weather that they feel so bitterly. And pneumonia and kindred chest troubles carry them off wholesale.

An hour farther on we found the water he had spoken of. It was a small and nearly dry pit, and the bucket or two of water left in it was filled with squirming animalcules. But the little we carried

was getting perilously low, and we made a fire and boiled a billy of it for coffee, straining it through a handkerchief, and getting quite a tablespoonful of mosquito larvæ and other weird things in the process. Still, the coffee was drinkable in spite of a strong animal taste, and all might have been well had I not had the temerity to look at those animalcules through my prospecting glass afterwards. I was sorry immediately, but it was too late—the coffee had been drunk.

That evening, footsore and dog-tired, we straggled into a narrow sandy valley between rocky kopjes, the foothills of a big mountain behind and the spot long reputed to be rich in diamonds. There was not a scrap of wood, not a bush or a bit of vegetation anywhere, nor could we find any of the dry cow-droppings which can be used as an alternative fuel. We had scarcely a pint of water between us, and had to reserve that for the morrow, and long before the end of a bitterly cold night I would have given my chance of any diamonds I was likely to find for an armful of firewood or a cup of hot coffee.

It is seldom very dark on the wide spaces of the veldt, but the night was of inky blackness, and rain threatened in all directions; and as we huddled up under the shelter of a big rock the wind swept howling round us, chilling us to the very bone. Occasionally a few drops of rain fell, but luckily the threatened storm kept off, and after an interminable period of fitful naps, punctuated by an occasional tramp up and down to warm our half-frozen limbs, the bright "morning star" that heralds the dawn rose and showed cheerily through the lightening clouds. Still, it seemed an endless time to daybreak, and all my attempts to cheer myself with visions of a possible Golconda to reward me brought me but scant comfort. With morning, cold, bleak, and cheerless as a bad November day in Europe, we started up the sand river, finding almost immediately large masses of rock garnet and countless quartz crystals, bright, glittering, but of course quite valueless. And though I put in a long, thirsty day, till well on in the

afternoon, searching and sieving, not a particle of anything else did I find to warrant the "diamondiferous" reputation of that wretched valley. Meanwhile I had sent Sam with our water-bottles to a kloof he knew of a couple of hours' journey away, where he had found water on a previous visit; and late in the afternoon he returned with sufficient to make a billy of coffee, for the fuel for which he brought a small bundle of laboriously collected twigs. As I had seen quite enough of this "Sindbad's Valley" by this time, we struck out for home, not following our previous route, but striking straight across more open country to the north-west. Except that we found sufficient wood before dark to make a fire that lasted only long enough to tantalise us (and make us feel colder than ever, afterwards!), this night was a replica of the previous one, and I determined that, if I had to spend another night on the veldt, I would at all costs make for a spot where wood was to be found, if such were possible. However, late that afternoon, and when we were still a good ten miles or more of rough country from our camp, Sam climbed one of the isolated granite kopjes that form such a feature of that part of Klein Namaqualand and Little Bushmanland, and yelled out that he could see a "house." It turned out to be the canvas "house" of a trek Boer, who, with his small flock of sheep and a few oxen, had pitched his portable residence at some old abandoned pits that a lucky shower had partly filled with water, and near which, at the foot of a big kopje, we found enough wood to keep us fairly warm that night.

He was a most naïve sort of old chap, typical of the degenerate "poor white" trek Boer of these barren, desolate and almost uninhabited wastes, appallingly ignorant and indescribably dirty. His canvas "house" was about 15 feet square, and in it he and his enormous wife, two grown sons and three strapping daughters lived, slept, and had their being. He questioned me minutely as to who I was, where I came from, whether I was married, how many

children I had, etc., and at each and all of my answers in broken Dutch he and his whole tribe laughed immoderately. He himself, as he proudly told me, had seen an Engelsman before, often, but not so his children. I gave him a little tobacco, which he had not seen for some weeks, and offered to buy a goat from him to kill for our general benefit, but this he would not sell ; in fact, I always found it extremely difficult to get these " back-of-beyant " farmers to sell any of their scanty small stock at any price. They lived entirely upon milk and Boer meal, which they ground themselves in a small flat stone hand-mill, catching the meal in a goat-skin below. In fact they were as primitive, practically, as the Bushman of the desert ; more primitive certainly than the patriarch Abraham, after whom the old man was named. I had sent Sam on to the spot where he had seen the wood, to make a *Scherm* and a big fire for the night, but the old man wanted badly for me to sleep in his house ! Seven adults—and four of them women—all in a tiny room where there were also several fowls, two big lurchers, and a sick kid ! The fact of there being any impropriety in my sharing a room with all his womenfolk certainly never entered his head, and he evidently thought me quite mad to choose the cold night outside to the " warmth " and comfort (?) of his *huis*. Thanks to the roaring fire, we put in a fairly good night, and afternoon of the next day saw us back in camp—none too soon, for my stout boots had given in and I was wellnigh barefooted.

Next day I struck camp and started back to Van Ryn's Dorp, disheartened with my fruitless search and eager for news, for I had heard nothing for six weeks.

In the dorp I found letters from Cape Town, telling me of still more marvellous finds in German South-West, for now parties had struck south from Luderitzbucht, and the fabulously rich Pomona fields were upon everyone's lips. There was talk of a bucketful of diamonds having been impounded and lying in the " Deutsche Bank " waiting for a decision

as to their rightful owner; of the first prospectors picking up diamonds by the handful, filling their pockets with them (which they literally did!). And I thought of Jim and his offer to take us south, and wept and would not be comforted!

The local news was startling, too; diamonds, and prospecting for them, were on everybody's lips, and rumour was persistent that a large number of stones had been found by the party who had gone north. One of these prospectors, it appeared, had passed through the dorp post-haste on his way back to Cape Town, and had let drop many hints as to the richness of his finds. One man solemnly assured me that, although he had not seen the actual stones, he had been shown a fragment of the rock with the holes in it from which they had been picked, like currants from a bun! "There was the shape of the facets quite plain," he concluded triumphantly, and there were many other "confirmations" of a like nature. But, absurd as most of these rumours were, there appeared to be too much smoke to be quite without fire, and I determined to try to reach that prospecting party and see what truth there might be in it. But its exact whereabouts was hard to discover till by luck a waggon came in from a distant part of the backveld within a few miles of where this party were working. These waggoners were bastards of a queer breed, German on the father's side with a Hottentot mother, and their Dutch was worse than my own—which sweeping assertion I make with all due consideration. And as a result we got on very well together, and they agreed to go as soon as they had had their burst out, and got their provisions in.

Three days did this, and taking nothing but some food and my sleeping gear, I turned back again with these peculiar mongrels, who were still so full and reeking of bad *dop* that I was afraid to smoke anywhere near their breath. They were genial kind of savages, however, and once the *dop* was finished we got on very well together. We had to make a detour

by way of their dwelling, a canvas *huis* similar to friend Abraham's, but decidedly cleaner, and where I slept cosily on the corn-sacks in the waggon ; and three days after leaving the dorp I came up to the prospecting party, in very wild country, at a place called Davedas. I heard them blasting long before I reached them, and extending to them the prospector's etiquette learnt in an older country, I did not go near their shaft, but sent one of the drivers to say that I should like one of the " baases " to come over to my waggon.

He came back telling me that he had been told to *voetsack*, and a few minutes afterwards a white man came across to me and surlily told me to do the same. I politely told him that all I wanted to know was how far his ground extended and where his pegs stood, and he explained that the whole earth was his and that I could get to hell out of it. Altogether he was a most polished and obliging kind of chap. Meanwhile the men had outspanned, and here we stayed the night. After dark several of the " boys " came down to our fire, and to my astonishment and delight I recognised one Jonas, a Cape boy who had worked for me on the diggings some three years before. He was as pleased as I was, and told me all about it. He said that, as far as he knew, not a single diamond had been found, nor had there been any trace of diamondiferous ground or " wash," except in a sand river some miles back on the road. As for where they were sinking a shaft, well, he thought they might be after copper, for they had gone down on green stains in a quartz reef in granite, but as for diamonds—— ? As all this coincided with and confirmed what I could see of the country itself, I decided not to trouble about the matter, and get back as soon as possible. So I gave Jonas enough twist tobacco to make him happy, and having heard how one of his " baases " had met me, he went back with the avowed intention of " putting the wind up " that same surly individual.

What peculiar variety of lie he used I don't know, but it was effective, for the next morning he turned

up with a broad grin, and a bottle of milk, and a polite message as to where the pegs were.

Later I went round and looked at them ; they were all base mineral licences. And as I saw no use for base minerals hundreds of miles from a railway, and as the ground showed no trace of anything else, I turned back towards Van Ryn's Dorp. At the sand river and at a weird-looking spot known as "Dood Drenk" I found traces that the sand had been worked, but as half a day's sieving found nothing, I gave up all hope of and all belief in diamonds existing in that locality.

There was no chance of getting back to Cape Town for a few days, and whilst waiting for the post cart I heard something that again sent my hopes sky-high, for a time !

I had bought a few stores on previous visits at a small local storekeeper's named C. He was a Jew, and had all the curiosity and enterprise of his extraordinary race. And one evening he came to me in a most mysterious manner, and after a lot of circumlocution he told me that if I liked to join him in a trip he would show me a big diamond "as big as the top of his thumb," and take me to the place where it had been found. And after a great deal of talk he showed me a scrawl from a customer of his in the district, which conveyed such intelligence. This man, he explained, was an old coloured man who had been granted a piece of land somewhere on the northern bank of the Olifants River, on Government ground there, and not far distant from gravels that I had seen and thought well of on my previous trip. C. had several messages to come out and see the stone, and all his efforts to get the old man to bring his precious treasure-trove in had failed, as the finder had heard of the I.D.B. Act, and feared the police would take both him and the stone. Well, it took time to make C. understand the provisions of that Act, but eventually he followed my advice and took out a licence himself, and the pair of us set out for the scene of the find, quite prepared to peg the whole country.

The weather had turned both wet and colder, and the discomforts of that three-days' trip in an open cart to Olifants Drift, Ebenezer, and thence in a boat to a lonely part of the north bank of the river, I shall never forget ; but suffice to say that at length, cold, wet, tired, and generally disgusted, we stood in a native *pondhoek* before a frightened old nigger, who, being repeatedly assured that I was not a policeman, and only wanted to see the " diamond " and where it came from, at length dug up from the floor of his hut a tiny tobacco-bag from which, rolled in a whole volume of rags, he eventually produced a big, bright, but utterly worthless quartz crystal !

Disheartened and disillusioned, I turned back towards Van Ryn's Dorp, but my luck was dead out, for scarcely had I passed Olifants Drift when the cart got badly smashed up and I was forced to bivouac for four days on the veldt.

It was a wild and lonely spot, and during the first two days of my enforced wait I saw no one, but on the third I woke to find the whole veldt alive with a magnificent flock of beautiful fleecy Angora goats. They were trekking north, and after 3,000-odd of them had passed with their " herds," a very fine Cape cart hove in sight with their owner. He proved to be a certain Mr. Brand, a nephew of the late president of the O.R.F.S., who had for many years been farming in the Gibeon District of German South-West Africa. He had been to Cape Town to buy these Angoras, with which he intended stocking his farm experimentally, and was trekking with them over the 800-odd miles of wild country between Table Bay and his lonely home.

He had plenty of time, and stayed a whole day with me, and when he heard what I had been after he told me a tale that almost sent me back to the wilds of German territory again. It was the tale of the first discovery of diamonds in German South-West, years before they were found in Luderitzbucht, a tale of a German soldier on patrol, separated from his comrades and lost in a blinding sand-storm. He

had struggled on for days, lost to all sense of direction, and when at his last gasp had been found by wandering Bushmen, and taken to an oasis in the desert, where not only was there an abundance of water, but diamonds by the thousand. Here he was kept captive, but eventually escaped and got back to Swakopmund, where he had been struck off the rolls as dead. His one idea was to organise an expedition to go to this spot for the diamonds, but no one believed him ; his tale was laughed at, and it was thought that his sufferings in the desert had driven him mad.

One fine day he was missing again, and it was found he had taken mules and a considerable amount of water, and no more was heard of him, until some months later his body was found in the sands near Swakopmund, bloated and swollen with the poison of a Bushman's arrow, that had pierced him through and through. His rags of clothing had been rifled, but in an old pocket-book near was found a rough diary he had kept of his route, and four large rough diamonds.

This was the tale that Brand told me, and this had been the origin of the belief of the existence of the oasis usually known as " Hottentots' (or Bushmen's) Paradise " to which I have previously alluded, and the search for which from Luderitzbucht had already cost several lives.

Well, Mr. Brand assured me that he was one of the four men who had seen both the diamonds and the pocket-book with the original map. And, seeing I was keenly interested, he said, " Why not go after it yourself ? I will help find the money. But you must take camels and work from the coast. And you must land near Hollam's Bird Island, at Strandlooper's Water, and go straight east." And although I had not told Brand so, this was close to the spot at which we had searched the beach, and from the dunes of which Du Toit has seen an oasis in the heart of the dunes eastward. So that, although I abandoned the Van Ryn's Dorp district as a bad job, I had much food for thought on my way back to Cape Town.

CHAPTER V

"ANDERSON'S DIAMONDS"—PRIESKA, UPINGTON—THE SOUTHERN KALAHARI.

In Cape Town I heard that the prospecting craze had reached Port Nolloth, that the whole of the beach there had been pegged, and that parties of prospectors had spread northward up the coast towards the Orange River. Apparently, therefore, Du Toit and myself were forestalled in our cherished scheme of trying the gravels along the lower reaches of that little-known stream ; but I wrote immediately to my old partner, telling him of all I had heard from Brand, and asking him to join me in an organised attempt to reach Bushmen's Paradise. Unfortunately, however, my letter crossed one of his announcing his immediate sailing from Durban for Australia, and I never heard from him again.

Such an expedition as I proposed would undoubtedly have located the spot had it existed, but whilst the scheme was yet in embryo I had an offer which drove all thoughts of it out of my head for some months.

One day I was asked to examine a small collection of stones brought from a remote part of the Kalahari Desert, and give an opinion as to what kind of deposit they might denote. And I found this little "parcel" to consist of an almost complete assortment of various minerals usually found in or associated with diamondiferous "blue ground"—or Kimberlite. Garnet, olivine, chrome-diopside, ilmenite (often called "carbon"), all were there, as well as one or two of the rarer minerals generally found in the same company ; and although there were a few extraneous fragments of other stones having no bearing on or connection

with the rest, I had no hesitation in saying that if they had all been found together they certainly denoted an occurrence of "blue ground" in the immediate vicinity.

I was then told the romantic story of their discovery, a tale of forty years back, of a time when diamonds had but recently been discovered in Kimberley, and little was known of the true nature of the pipes there. At that time a traveller named Anderson, who had seen the new mines, entered the Kalahari on an exploring and shooting expedition—one of many he made in that region—and somewhere in the vicinity of Hachschein Vley he had come upon a valley enclosed by rocks similar to those forming the walls of the Kimberley mines, and a slight excavation he had been able to make in the limestone capping had produced not only these samples, but "hundreds of garnets," and certain green gem-stones that he had afterwards sold in Cape Town. The hostility of a native tribe in the vicinity had prevented his following up his discovery, and he had been forced to leave the spot, to which he had always intended to return, but had never been able. He was now dead, and certain of his papers, including a description of the spot and how to reach it, a map and the samples, were now in the possession of the gentleman who had shown them to me.

The opinion expressed by me as to the probable source of the stones was corroborated by several well-known geologists; an expedition to endeavour to locate the spot was finally decided upon, and I was commissioned to undertake it.

Now, the Kalahari is practically what it was in Anderson's day (though since then the whole of it has become British), and the Bushmen that were a menace to the old traveller, though still existing, are a dying and scattered race, too few and too timid to be taken into consideration to-day.

And though an examination of the old map showed the spot to be marked in close proximity to where the most northern of our border camel-police posts

has since Anderson's day been established, the region is still wild, remote, and very little known, so little, indeed, that it was almost impossible to obtain any exact information in Cape Town as to the best route to follow to get there.

In those days, and indeed up till after the war broke out, Prieska formed the railway terminus in that direction ; beyond it there stretched 150 miles of very bad, almost waterless country, wellnigh uninhabited, before Upington could be reached ; and even when this little border dorp on the Orange River was arrived at, it was but the "kicking-off place" for the Southern Kalahari, and a good 200 miles of the desert had to be traversed before the truth of the traveller's tale could be confirmed or otherwise. So here was an adventure worth having ; a long trek through a little-known country, almost untouched by the prospector, with sport and adventure *en route*, and who knew what riches waiting to be discovered at the end of it ? And within forty-eight hours of the decision to send us, my fellow-adventurer and myself were ready for our long trip. Except the lightest of prospecting-gear, arms and ammunition, and a box of stores, we took but little from Cape Town, for the trip was in no sense meant to include a long stay at the spot—simply a verification of its existence, and as rapid a return as possible to the nearest base of communication to send word of the result.

The few people in the concern who had ever been farther than Upington warned us that we were mad to attempt the journey at such a time, one of the hottest months of the year, telling us awful yarns of the thirst we were likely to suffer, and counselling a wait of some months till the cooler season ; but the promoters were eager for the mine, and urged the danger of delay, as at any time the place might be stumbled on (after its forty years of waiting). And we were as eager as were they !

So one fine summer's day the north-bound mail carried us 500 miles north-east to De Aar, whence

we pottered for half a day back at an obtuse angle, east, about 100 miles to Prieska, when the train journey ended and the trek began.

Few years ago as it was, at that time there was not even a motor-car service to either Kenhart, Upington, Kakamas, or any of the far townships of the German border. Twice a week a post-cart jogged over the apology for a road, with letters to the "backveld," and occasionally a commercial traveller followed the same path; but wayfarers of any description other than local farmers or stock-buyers were rare enough to make us the object of a considerable amount of curiosity, and during the few hours we stayed in the little "border" dorp the place was humming with rumours as to who we were and where we were bound for.

We had been warned that this kind of thing would happen, and that if our true object leaked out we should be followed—perhaps forestalled. And I must say that for naïve and insatiable inquisitiveness into the doings of strangers, the inhabitants of the wild and neglected districts of the north-west are very hard to beat. At the lonely and poverty-stricken farmsteads all along the route we were invariably subjected to a regular inquisition, as to who we were, where we came from, where we were going, and above all, why, why, why had we come into those parts? Why? indeed! For there appeared little or nothing to attract anyone to this desolate and barren countryside, devastated by drought, neglected and ignored, without any of the conveniences of more favoured regions, a very Cinderella among South African districts. The advent of a rare stranger—especially if he looked a townsman and an "Engelsman"—usually gave rise to some faint hope that at length the *spoorweg* (railway) was coming, or roads were to be made, or a mine opened, or some kind of *Gouvermentse werk* to be started to benefit the country at long last.

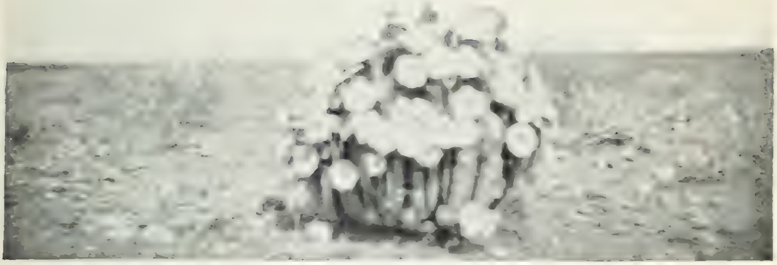
But after all, we had little to fear from these poor chaps; the danger came from the townsmen we had

left, for our coming and our object were both known in Upington before we got there, and all arrangements had been made for our being followed. However, I anticipate.

We succeeded in hiring a light spring-waggon with six good horses, and the fourth day saw us at the drift at Upington, having passed through one of the most dreary and monotonous parts of South Africa *en route*, a part calling for no special mention, as it is utterly devoid of scenery or of any object of interest. Dreary stretches of flat stony veldt, incredibly bare, and denuded of even its modicum of straggling vegetation, for miles on either side of the road, by the crowds of donkeys that then hauled the heavy transport-waggons from the railway to the far backveldt, and which crawled along at a snail's pace over the interminable distance, often taking three weeks to accomplish the 150 miles between Prieska and Upington.

Luckily we were in no such case, but trundled comfortably along, doing our thirty-five or fifty miles a day, outspanning at night and sleeping under the cart, and getting seasoned for the real work of the desert farther north. On our right hand, most of the journey, ran a long line of barren hills; these denoted the course of the Orange River, which we left at Prieska and did not see again till we reached Upington. Altogether a most dreary and monotonous journey so far, and by no means the "joy-ride" we anticipated, the only pleasurable incident being when the surly driver sat on a scorpion by the camp fire one evening. However, at last the dreary stretches of sad-looking veldt, varied only by heavy sand, became broken by a few prominent granite kopjes, and eventually, on cresting a low stony ridge, we came in sight of the long winding belt of vegetation denoting the Orange River. On its far (northern) bank, white houses were dotted along in a thin straggling line; this was Upington. Beyond, as far as the eye could reach, stretched a vast, slowly rising, undulating expanse of sad, dun-coloured, featureless

country, the southern dunes of the Kalahari, the "Great Thirst Land"—the land we were bound for, and in the wilds of which we hoped to find a fortune. Away to our left, westward and at a great distance, rose a line of jagged fantastic peaks, pale cobalt against the white glare of the sky; these peaks I had cause to know only too intimately later. They were the Noup Hills, an almost unexplored maze of low mountains situated below the Great Falls of the Orange and just on the border of German South-West, some seventy miles distant from us. Before reaching the very welcome river, however, we had to toil through a terrible "drift" of the softest, most powdery sand and silt that ever hampered a team even in this country of sand-drifts; it was a sort of sand-quagmire, in fact, if such a thing is imaginable, and in it the waggon sank up to the hubs, and progress was most maddeningly slow. This silt is really that brought down and spread out on either side of the river by successive floods, and is, wherever irrigated, most astonishingly fertile. Once through it, and amongst magnificent trees we came to the river, this most welcome oasis between two deserts; for the southern country is quite as well-deserving of the name as the true Kalahari of the northern bank. In flood-time it is a broad and noble stream with some magnificent stretches of water, often 400 yards or more in width, but at the time of our arrival it was low, and we were able to drive through its shallow *drifts* and climb out on the north bank without recourse to the pontoon by which it is usually crossed. Along its bank's summit runs the straggling street, knee-deep almost in Kalahari sand. A "hotel," post and telegraph office, a church or two, and quite a number of large stores made the one street; these stores I found wonderfully well stocked considering their 150 miles' distance from a railway, and apparently far too numerous for the inhabitants' requirements. Many of them had sprung into being during the German-Hottentot-Herrero War, when Upington had flourished exceed-



A FLOWER OF THE DESERT, SOUTHERN KALAHARI.
Flowering succulent, about 3 feet high.



THE CAMEL POST AT ZWARTMODDER, GORDONIA.

ingly on the enormous amount of transport passing through it on the way to the German border. Since those palmy days things had slumped, most of the storekeepers apparently living on each other and all uniting in praying for a new war. They had great hopes when Ferreira broke across the border in his German-inspired, abortive raid, but unfortunately for them it ended in smoke.

The proximity to the German border was rendered noticeable in Upington principally on account of the prevalence of German money there. Practically no English silver was to be seen, and except at the post office the cheap, trashy-looking mark passed for and purchased the equivalent amount of a shilling's-worth.

I have already alluded to the fertility of the silt on the banks of the Orange River, but scarcely believed the statements of some of the inhabitants until, later, I saw with my own eyes the marvellous crops that it is capable of producing. Oranges, especially the variety known as the "Washington Navel," grow to a profusion, perfection, and abundance truly wonderful, as do peaches, grapes, and in fact almost every variety of fruit; though both soil and climate seem to favour the various varieties of citrus most of all.

Between the trees of the carefully cultivated groves the farmers grow lucerne, which again thrives astonishingly, crop following crop almost as fast as it is cut, eight or nine times a year being quite common. Unfortunately, the irrigable land consists of a comparatively narrow strip averaging about half a mile in width, though there are spots where it is much wider, and in many places the river is split up into numerous channels enclosing densely wooded islands, which, wherever cleared and cultivated, give the same abundant crops. Lower down the river a certain amount of grain is grown, and it is claimed that wheat has here yielded the wonderful harvest of 246 bushels for one of seed—surely a world's record? Altogether it needs no prophet to predict that the

time will come when this long, winding oasis through the desert will be populated and utilised from end to end, as it deserves to be. But except for a brief drive or two we saw but little of this fertile belt on this visit, for within twenty-four hours of our arrival we were *en route* again, this time in a Cape cart drawn by eight sturdy oxen, who are far better able to cope with heavy sand than are horses or mules, and whose steady, untiring walk or jog-trot gets them over the ground at a far quicker rate than would appear. As we were now entering a region where water is at its scarcest, we carried a considerable quantity of this prime necessity, a small cask, several tin cans, and a big canvas water-bag and aluminium water-bottle each. Our driver was a Boer who had been in the camel police, and knew the road to the north well, and for *voorleir* we had a diminutive Hottentot Bushman boy with the most marvellous eyesight imaginable. Often this queer, monkey-faced little chap would call our attention to game far ahead of us, the long neck of a *paauw* among the bushes, a good 500 yards away, and which our field-glasses hardly showed us, or a tiny *steenbok* standing motionless among cover at double the distance; and his dexterity at picking up a spoor and following it was almost superhuman.

He knew each and every hoof-mark of his own eight charges even when they were mixed up with hundreds of others at the various water-holes, and he often pointed out the spoor of animals in the hard stony places that occasionally divided the dunes, and where the closest scrutiny of my own fairly good eyes showed me nothing. He was a source of perpetual interest to me, and taught me a good deal of veldt lore on that long trudge to the north. But our driver was by no means a pleasant man; he was a taciturn and bad-tempered individual who hated and despised all Englishmen and took little pains to conceal the fact, and within twenty-four hours of leaving Upington I was hard at work trying to keep the peace between him and my companion. The

latter was a young Englishman, an accountant from Cape Town who had put in a good veldt apprenticeship in the B.B.P. in Rhodesia, and who, finding our driver would not be companionable, wanted to punch him. This I would have been very pleased to let him do thoroughly, but having left Upington, and with no other team or teamster to replace him, it would have been extremely bad policy. Moreover in some cases he was not at fault ! For instance, G. was constantly accusing him of cruelty to his oxen, but this was only apparent, or in some cases necessary. G. wanted to push forward, as I did, and could not understand the arbitrary manner in which we trekked, outspanning in awful spots for hours in the sun without an atom of shade, pushing on in the dark when G. wanted to sleep, and above all stopping for hours in the night to sleep, and keeping the oxen tight-spanned in their heavy yokes. This "unnecessary cruelty," as G. termed it, annoyed him so much that one night when we were all asleep he quietly let them loose, "so that they could have a good sleep, poor things," as he put it. A few hours later, when inspan time came, there was trouble, for the "poor things" had cleared, some on the back trail for home, two old hands straight ahead to the next water-hole, and the rest due east into the real dunes of the forbidden Game Reserve, where there was an abundance of grass. The result was a day's delay in retrieving them, and in future G. admitted the driver knew his own business best. Indeed, trekking in these deserts is an art in itself, bound by laws that are only known to men who know the roads intimately; and to attempt to trek a certain number of hours, and outspan a certain number of regular times, is out of the question. In the hottest time of the day, when the sand is almost red-hot, the oxen cannot and will not trek ; then, whatever happens, at sunrise and sunset they must be loosed and rested for a while, and the problem is made more difficult by the necessity of finding grazing for them *en route*, and, above all, watering

them. Much of our trekking was done at night, when oxen travel well, but this was a great drawback in many ways, as it left us ignorant of much of the country travelled through. All up the border, which, as I have before written, is the 20th degree of east longitude, there stretches a narrow fringe of desert " farms," many of them huge blocks of 20,000 morgen (roughly 40,000 acres) each, mostly, too, of barren, sandy, waterless land, " farms " indeed only in name. Some of them have one or two water-holes, some have none whatever. A few have so-called " homesteads " on them, generally a forlorn dwelling little better than a hovel, though there are one or two exceptions of a better type. But wild and desolate as are these stretches of land, many of them are capable of sustaining large flocks of sheep, goats, and cattle; indeed, the number of fat beasts running on certain of these inhospitable-looking wastes is surprising. And the " poverty " of the scattered inhabitants is not nearly as bad as it appears, their wretched homes and the squalor of their surroundings being almost as inexcusable as their appalling filth. This latter was the more noticeable at some of the farms along the Molopo, the dry bed of which eventually forms the route north, where water can always be found on boring. Often there is an aero-motor and a well-built stone dam full of water, stagnant and filthy and full of animalcules for the want of cleaning out; and from this filthy pestiferous brew the owners would dip the drinking-water for their needs, rather than take the two minutes' trouble of unhitching the motor and getting a splendid stream of crystal water, flowing pure and fresh from the abundant supply below. Of course there were exceptions, but the bulk of these degenerate people apparently never dreamed of washing themselves, except when they made their periodical visit to *nachtmaal* at far-distant Upington. The vicinity of one of these " farms " was usually heralded by an appalling smell, for generally in the near vicinity were to be seen several swollen, rotten carcasses of

goats, cattle, sheep, or horses, dead of *lungziekte* or *nieuwziekte* or *paardeziekte*, or one of the many diseases that had recently devastated the animals in these parts.

No matter how near they might have died to house or water, no attempt appeared ever to have been made to drag the putrid carcass away or bury it, and the offal of slain animals usually strewed the vicinity of the house to the very doorstep. Quite recently an epidemic of typhoid had devastated the whole of this border region, and I believe many learned treatises were written as to what peculiar form of fever it may have been and how it originated—but surely the cause was not far to seek!

However, we jogged steadily along, and after one or two experiences gave these places as wide a berth or as short a visit as we possibly could, and this much to our driver's disgust, for naturally he wished to visit all of them, spend an hour or two in gossiping at each, and whenever possible sleep in the ferret-hutch atmosphere of their interiors at night, instead of out under the stars as we did. Still, *De gustibus non disputandum* holds good in Gordonia as elsewhere, I suppose, and as long as he did not delay us and kept his distance for a while afterwards, we did not mind where he slept.

It is not my intention to turn this account into a guide-book description of the journey, most of which was absolutely featureless and uninteresting, but a brief outline of the route followed might be of interest.

Trekking from Upington at 5 one evening, we kept on steadily till 11, when we turned in on the cool sand and slept comfortably till 4.30, when we started again, and at 7 o'clock passed the deserted copper-mine at Areachap, which had but recently been closed down, and presented the sad sight of a beautifully equipped and rich little mine being beaten in its struggle for existence by the heavy handicap of being situated 170 miles or so from the nearest railway. Rich heaps of ore lay there ready to be carted away, there was much valuable machinery

going to rack and ruin, and the buildings must have cost a large sum to erect ; and here it stood, alone and deserted in the midst of the solitary waste of veldt, guarded only by a couple of coloured "boys" —a sad monument of man's energy wasted in a hopeless fight against adverse circumstances, or worse! The tall yellow shaft was visible hours after we had left it, a most prominent and incongruous landmark in the wide expanse of desert.

A mile or so farther on we found that rain had fallen, and at the pools of shallow water lying in the road were Namaqua partridges by the thousand. These little plump, pretty game-birds are really a sand-grouse, and to such an extent do they abound in these districts that at the rare water-holes and at their drinking hours the air is literally full of them. An hour or two after sunrise and again at sunset they come to the water, huge coveys of them whirring in from all directions, and swarming towards the drinking-place in incredible numbers. In the stone-strewn *aars* that are a feature of this country these little birds take advantage of their marvellous protective colouring, and I have often actually kicked against them crouching amongst, and absolutely indistinguishable from, the stones around them until they moved, when a whole covey would whirr up from beneath my feet. The driver frequently killed them with his whip from his seat on the cart, and we called down upon us his derision by shooting a few single ones that we put up by the path. He told us that was by no means the way, and that with one cartridge he would fill the pot for us, which of course he easily did by hiding behind a bush near the water and firing into the thick of them. Indeed, it is no uncommon thing to bag fifty or more at a shot in this manner, and though far from being "sport," we soon found that on a long trip where ammunition could not be replenished it would scarcely pay to pot at single partridges ; and in future we kept our big Kaffir pot filled with them by this most unsportsmanlike but profitable method.

A bit of bacon, an onion, a little pepper and salt, and a potful of these little chaps, make a stew fit for a king, and with plenty of Boer meal "pap" and syrup and roster kook, G. and I sighed for nothing better; but the driver turned up his nose at the despised *vogelkies* and pined for his beloved *vleesch*. Whenever he could get a chunk of goat or sheep he filled a pot and àte to repletion of the half-cooked, tough, and flavourless contents. When he could not get it, and perforce had to eat the birds, a dozen of them were but a sort of appetiser to him. As a beverage we drank tea, quarts and quarts of it, made in the kettle itself, without milk and with an abundance of sugar, for this was a trip *de luxe*, during which neither food nor water ran short.

On the third day two white men overtook and passed us, on horseback, not keeping the trail but away to the right of us, and apparently anxious to avoid us. This was peculiar, as in a country where days may pass without seeing a soul by the way, the custom is to seek the infrequent wayfarer rather than to avoid him, and I began to think of all I had been told about being followed. The driver, who had seen them pass, said he was sure they were not police, and Piet, the *voorlooper* of the telescopic eyes, corroborated this. Again and again we caught sight of them, sometimes ahead, sometimes behind or on our flank, but they never came near us, and it soon became pretty clear that we were being "shepherded." Once or twice we tried to signal to them by waving a handkerchief and shouting, but they took no notice, and G., exasperated at their attitude, seriously suggested having a shot at them with the rifle.

CHAPTER VI

ZWARTMODDER—THE MOLOPO—RIETFONTEIN—THE GAME RESERVE.

On the third day we reached Zwartmodder, a tiny police post and store in the old dry bed of the Molopo, whose course we were now to follow for some days. The two policemen (C.M.P.) stationed at this lonely little spot told us the horsemen had gone straight through without coming near the station, and confirmed us in our suspicion as to what these sneaks were after. Zwartmodder is a weird and desolate little place standing in a deep, narrow, rock-walled valley, whose sandy floor was the bed of the ancient river that once flowed right across what is now the Kalahari Desert from near Mafeking, westward, and then south, for many hundreds of miles, till it joined the Orange below the great falls of Aughrabies. In most places it is sand-choked to the level of the surrounding desert. In others, though still dry, it is filled with vegetation, and indeed many stretches farther north are well timbered, with fine mimosa and other thorn-trees. But, with the exception of one or two melancholy survivors, there are none of these trees left near Zwartmodder, the channel being loose sand where it is not the "black mud" from which the place is named.

Made anxious by this particular "shadowing" by men who kept ahead of us, I consulted the driver as to whether we could leave the track and give them the slip, and for the first time showed him the map old Anderson had made.

Considering the time that had elapsed since it was drawn, we had found it so far astonishingly accurate. It showed the old traveller's road from

Griquatown along the northern bank of the Orange to "Klaas Lucas Kraal," a native stadt in those days, and now Upington ; it gave the route northward to the Hygap (the Hottentot name for the Molopo) and Zwartmodder, and thence clearly to Hachshein Vley and the spot we hoped to find a fortune in. And the driver, after perusing it, told us that, whatever we might do when we arrived at the vley, we must follow the present road that far. For eastward stretched the unknown, waterless, and forbidden wastes of the Game Reserve, and westward, and nearer to us each day of our trek, was the frontier-line and German territory, to enter which and trek north would mean endless red tape and obstruction. So there was no help for it but to keep on as we were going, up the dry bed of the Molopo. The following day we struck an oasis in the shape of a clean, comfortable, and well-furnished dwelling, the farm "Bloemfontein," whose then owners were an object-lesson to their benighted neighbours as to what comfort can be obtained by a little trouble and expense, even here on the fringe of the desert. Here I was shown some very fine-looking "yellow ground" from an adjoining farm near the German border which was being worked for diamonds. It looked extremely promising, and contained plenty of "carbon," garnets, etc., but the other stones shown me in conjunction with it were zircons and not diamonds, as had been believed. This gentleman also told me of many strange "pans" in the real desert eastward, where diamonds were supposed to exist, but in which direction all prospecting and even trekking was now forbidden, and his experiences so interested me that I resolved sooner or later to explore those "pans" myself.

At Witkop the following day I had further evidence shown me of the abundance of diamondiferous "indications" that are such a feature of Gordonia, for here "yellow ground," with all its usual inclusions, was to be seen in close proximity to the road, and indeed there is proof everywhere in this locality

that pipes, fissures, or other occurrences of Kimberlite exist, and need but a little systematic prospecting to locate. Whether they are diamondiferous can only be proved by working them, but the fact that at various times diamonds have been picked up here and there in the vicinity certainly makes such a supposition reasonable.

However, we had neither the time nor the right to prospect these places and pushed steadily on, hearing occasionally from the far-apart farms or an infrequent wayfarer that our friends the would-be "claim-jumpers" kept about an hour ahead of us. Meanwhile we were getting deeper and deeper into the dunes, and frequently these now vied with the biggest I had ever seen in the sand-belt of German West. These, however, were different. The sand was redder, and only the crests of them were bare, the long "valleys" between their regular wave-like lines, and much of their slopes, being covered with low bushes and tufts of Bushman grass. They lay right athwart the path, and trekking over them was a most tedious and slow operation. Their usual slope was about 45 degrees up to within a short distance of the summit, where the sand, loose, soft, and unbound by vegetation, was often piled up by the prevailing wind into an apex that fell away on the leeward side almost perpendicularly. And after laboriously straining at our light cart up the rise, the oxen would go floundering down this declivity in a wild scramble, slipping, falling, and dragging each other and the cart in a jumble of confusion till they reached firmer footing below. To ride was impossible; indeed everything on the cart had to be made fast, or it stood a great chance of being thrown out and lost. In any case, however, we rode but seldom, ranging out on either side of the path all day with gun and rifle, hoping for the chance of a shot that seldom came. Game there was, for we saw spoors in abundance, but unfortunately these do not fill the pot, and in spite of the solitariness of the region both fur and feather were extremely wild. *Paauw*, that

most magnificent of bustards, was abundant but almost unapproachable : *klompjes* of four or five together rising repeatedly a few dunes ahead of us, but always well out of gunshot. Indeed, except at the hottest time of the day, when they, like the steenbok, can occasionally be caught napping in the shade of a bush, they are seldom obtainable with a gun, stalking them and shooting them through the head or neck with a rifle, at 200 yards or more, being the sportsman's only chance. The larger variety, known as the *gom paauw*, often weighs from 30 to 40 lb., and has been recorded up to 50 lb. or more. One of the largest I ever saw must have been well over that, for it stood quite five feet in height, and I took it to be a young ostrich when, in the grey light of morning, I one day came silently upon it within 40 or 50 yards. I had a rifle, but never dreamed of firing at an "ostrich," and stood staring open-mouthed when, after a run of a few yards, the huge creature got up and sailed majestically away.

Most frequent and most annoying among the larger game-birds was the *koorhaan*, whose irritating croaking cackle could be heard on all sides, and which seemed to take a mischievous delight in disturbing other game of a less suspicious nature, whenever we were engaged in attempting a stalk.

Occasionally a flock of wild ostriches would speed across the path with enormous strides, covering the ground at an incredible speed ; occasionally a tiny steenbok fell to the rifle, and once or twice a few gemsbok would be seen for a moment floundering over the crest of a distant dune, or, with heads thrown back and long sabre-like horns sloped in splendid attitude, would stand and gaze at us for a moment before bounding away. Big blue hawks with bright red beaks were plentiful, and I much regretted having one day shot one, for I found its crop full of snakes and lizards, and farmers have told me that this same *blaauw valk* does infinitely more good in this respect than the much-belauded secretary-bird.

We saw but few snakes, an occasional *geel capel* (yellow cobra) or a lazy and bloated puff-adder failing to get out of our way before we saw him, but scorpions were an absolute pest. They came along with their tails cocked up, rampant and vicious, and pining for something to sting, walking straight at the camp fire of an evening, and stinging at the embers till they sizzled on them, when the cheerful smell that arose would bring others by the dozen. At least, the natives firmly believe this, and certainly our experience confirmed it. In gathering firewood or dry leaves one had to be especially careful of these little pests, and it was no uncommon thing to find three or four nestling between our blankets and the sand in the morning. Often we amused ourselves by catching them and putting two together in a sieve on the ground, when after a little teasing they would fight furiously till both were stung to death.

We passed the tiny police post at Abiquas Pits, where two forlorn camel police are marooned in a desert of sand-dunes and have to guard (?) a district as big as an English county and watch about forty miles of the German frontier. The police force of this long border of ours is grotesquely inadequate and will be referred to later.

Thence we toiled through extremely heavy dunes, alternating with broad, flat stretches of hard shale, thickly strewn with stones that made our progress both difficult and painful. These stony spaces are known locally as *aars*, a name given to any feature on the surface which is long compared to its breadth, and the variety of water-worn stones with which they were strewn was astonishing. Fragments of igneous rock predominated, and conspicuous amongst them were many rounded fragments of a peculiar amygdaloid similar to that found near Pniel on the Vaal River, but by no means identical, the tiny steam-holes being filled with nodules of agate, chalcedony, and other forms of silica, or occasionally with a bright green mineral that I could not classify.

Prominent also were numerous lumps of bright

scarlet jasper, and the banded ironstone, usually associated with the diamond in the gravels of the River Diggings, was also here in abundance.

This débris, however, though it is found spread over hundreds of miles of country, is usually a very superficial layer thinly strewn over the shale. Where it came from is difficult to imagine, as few of the rocks of which it is composed are to be found locally; but evidence seems to point to its having been brought there by huge floods in the remote past, and at a period prior to the advent of the enormous accumulation of sand that now forms the dunes of the desert and covers up the bulk of the "country rock" of this wide, waterless region.

In the midst of these huge dunes, we one evening met a waggon belonging to a Boer who had for some time past been farming in German territory over the border, and as it was near outspan time we camped that night together. He had twenty-four sturdy oxen yoked to his buck-waggon, on which were piled his few household belongings and his numerous family. He had been one of the many "irreconcilables" who, having fought to the last in the Boer War, had refused to live under British rule, and had trekked to German West and there taken up land and settled down. And now, after years of galling and irksome submission to the German régime of red tape and officialism, he had been exasperated beyond all endurance by some sample of German "justice," and was trekking back, extremely thankful to be once more under the once despised and hated Union Jack, and full of the wrongs experienced at the hands of the *Duitsers*.

I met a number of these sadder and wiser men at various times along the border, and almost invariably their experiences of German rule had had a most salutary effect upon them, from a British point of view.

Eventually we emerged from these giant dunes on to a fairly wide, level plain known as Saulstraat, and here by the water-pits found six fine shady thorn-trees that had been planted in a line by some

thoughtful old pioneer of the desert; and as we had not seen anything bigger than a bush for some days past, it was most natural that we should seek their shade for our midday outspan. G. smoothed away a place from the fallen thorns and threw himself down, whilst I—much to his surprise—climbed into the cart and prepared to take my siesta in its very cramped space. " Why don't you come down here ? " asked G. I told him there might be insects. " Insects ! " he said, in high disdain, " insects ! Well, I always thought you were a crank, but that settles it ! Here we've been roasting for days till we smell like grilled steak, and when you get the chance of a bit of comfort in the shade of nice trees, you're afraid of insects ! Insects ! Why, there aren't any, and if there were they wouldn't keep me from this ! Insects ! "

" Be warned in time," I said solemnly. " These are no common insects."

" Oh, shut up," he snorted; " you and your old yarns ! I'm going to sleep." And he did ; but not for long. By my watch it took just four and a half minutes before he began to squirm a bit ; that meant the first sam-pan had started prospecting. Soon others evidently put their pegs in, and in seven and a half minutes the big rush came. I had always admired, indeed almost reverenced, G.'s ability to sleep at any time, anywhere, and under any conditions, but the way he withstood the combined onslaught of that army corps of sam-pans for fully another three minutes was an eye-opener as to what he could do. At last a big one at work on his nose must have struck it rich, for G. ceased his snores and his squirming, and still half asleep struck himself a violent blow right where the sam-pan was working. He let off a violent yell, and for the next few minutes his demeanour lacked dignity and repose. In the middle of his bad language I told him so, also that it was a pity to forget himself for the sake of a few insects.

" Insects ! " he snorted. " You call these blamed

calamities insects, do you? Right-oh, wait a bit, my son—I'll pay you for this."

And he did, for the next thing I heard was a splash, and there he was, clothes and all, in the water-pit—the only water we had, mind, for drinking purposes for the next twenty-four hours, for our cask and bags were empty when we arrived and we had not yet refilled them. I shall never forget those six thorn-trees at Saulstraat, nor the heat when we left the shade there, for I think that day was the hottest I experienced during the trip. The heat of the sand struck through our boot-soles as though we were walking on red-hot embers, whilst the gait of the poor oxen reminded me of the old saying, "like a cat on hot bricks." All round this flat plain between the dunes the mirage glittered until it was difficult to realise that we were not walking on the only dry spot in the midst of a wide lake. So perfect was the illusion that on looking back to the trees we saw them faithfully mirrored in the placid "water" beneath them, as were the high dunes and every little prominence in sight. However, after toiling through another barrier of high dunes we were cheered by the sight of real water, a fairly wide, shallow vley, with a number of oxen standing in it, showing where recent rains had fallen at Middle Pits. Here there was a substantially built house owned by a Bastard farmer, one of the few remaining original owners of these desert border farms. And here the sand-dunes came to an end. Ahead stretched flat country broken by one or two extraordinary black kopjes, the first sign of any intrusive rock we had seen since leaving Witkop. We had now for the first time an opportunity of giving our advance agents the slip, and turning abruptly from the path, we trekked all night, and in the morning were close to Rietfontein at the north-west corner of Hachschein Vley, and near our destination.

The vley is such only in name, being a wide expanse of flat country which has at one time been a shallow lake or marsh, and into which several small rivers

formerly ran. Except after rain these are, of course, dry, but in the "pan" itself water can be obtained almost anywhere at a comparatively shallow depth.

In Anderson's time this had been a noted place for lions, but they do not come as far south nowadays, and it was in this locality that the old traveller met with hostile Bushmen. No such place as Rietfontein then existed, but his map showed a native Kraal called "Quassama," and it appeared likely that the post at Rietfontein had been built on the site of this old Bushman village, which indeed proved to be the case.

If only on account of its remoteness and isolation, this tiny frontier post of ours merits description. Separated by nearly 150 miles of sand-dunes from a doctor or a telegraph station, or any of the conveniences of life even to be found at Upington, and almost double that distance from the nearest railway at Prieska, it surely vies with the police posts of the Canadian North-West border for loneliness and inaccessibility. Its only connecting-link with the Empire it belongs to is by this wearisome southern route that we had followed, for north of it there is no other post along the whole 600 miles of British-German border where the Bechuanaland Protectorate and German South-West march together to the Caprivi belt and the Portuguese territory of Angola. East stretches the whole breadth of the Southern Kalahari, pathless, waterless, and a forbidden land, between them and the Kuruman district, whilst westward they are bounded by foreign (German) territory.

The nucleus of this forlorn little settlement was the old mission-station belonging to the Rhenish Mission, and dating from the days of the Bushman kraal old Anderson had seen. It was a substantial stone-built dwelling, flanked with a chapel and standing by the all-important water-hole. There was the usual tiny oasis in the shape of a small garden with a few fig-trees, and half a dozen large *cameel doorn* in the sand near showed where the "river" at one time flowed;



A BEAUTIFUL GORGE OF THE ORANGE RIVER (NEAR "AUSENKEHR")

but other than this there was no sign of vegetation and the surroundings were barren and desolate, even for the desert. A small thatched building that served for Court-house (for Rietfontein is the seat of a magistracy), as well as residence for the magistrate and officer in charge of the police, a fairly well stocked store, and the few miserable hovels that housed the Bastard and Hottentot community of the mission, and the equally tumbledown quarters of the police troopers, constituted the whole of the most important police post along our whole frontier.

Of course the Rietfontein missionary was a German; moreover, although he was a J.P. of the district he had never taken the trouble to learn English, and his flock of coloured ragamuffins were as nearly Germanised as he had been able to make them. He proved to be the possessor of a very old map of the locality which gave all the old native names, and which I covet to this day, and upon which we were able to verify our idea as to Rietfontein and Quassama being identical.

And cheered by this fresh proof of Anderson's accuracy, within an hour of our arrival we again set out on foot, thinking to be able to walk straight to the "valley of diamonds" we had come so far to find. But alas! the map—so correct up to now—failed lamentably upon this most vital point of all, for certain physical features there laid down were utterly lacking in the direction the chart pointed to, and after spending the rest of the day in a vain search we came back considerably discouraged. And day after day the same thing happened. Having failed to find the spot at once, I obtained the services of one or two of the older Bastard inhabitants, as also an old Bushman, and under their guidance I wore out two pairs of strong boots in systematically searching the locality, putting in eight or ten hours of walking each day, and only giving up after ten days of this wearisome search, when I had absolutely convinced myself that no such place existed anywhere upon the ground I was entitled to prospect,

or indeed anywhere within many miles of the position marked so clearly upon the map. And so we had come nearly a thousand miles, over three hundred of which had been by trekking through a desert and difficult country, for nothing, simply upon another wild-goose chase!

I do not wish to say that no such spot ever existed. In fact, I have no doubt that Anderson made the discovery much as he described it; but my opinion is that he did not make the map till many years after his visit, and that the locality was wrongly marked by many miles.

Yet Kimberlite existed in the vicinity; indeed, a "blank" variety, containing but few inclusions, was to be seen in many of the dry watercourses that honeycombed the country, and I found garnets and ilmenite in one or two places, but none of the other minerals described and brought back by Anderson and shown me in Cape Town.

The fact having been reluctantly forced upon me that the map was wrong, I had at length no alternative but to abandon the search, our one consolation being that the two would-be "claim-jumpers" who had turned up at a neighbouring farm a day or two after our arrival, and who had laboriously followed me about the wild country ever since, had also had their trouble for nothing, besides being considerably mystified into the bargain. In spite of my failure, I should much have liked to put in a few months' systematic prospecting in the locality, for there were quite sufficient "indications" to warrant it, and such work might well have led to valuable discoveries.

But I had been instructed simply to verify the existence or otherwise of the place mentioned in Anderson's map, and there was nothing for it but to turn back on our long trek to civilisation.

During the short time we spent at Rietfontein we were most hospitably entertained by the officer in charge of the few camel police there, and found that he, in common with his men, was perfectly contented

with the solitary life they were forced to lead. He said that new-comers sometimes nearly go mad for the first month or two of their lonely and monotonous existence, but that they almost invariably get so attached to the place and the life that they seldom apply for a transfer, and the few who do so are usually anxious to return to the desert within a very short time. Yet the life is both hard and perilous, for their long patrols take them many days' distance into the desert, and often, in the waterless tracks near the Oup and Nosop "rivers" to the north or the equally thirst-stricken wastes eastward, they are faced with the danger of a death from thirst. With a view to minimising the danger of getting lost in these pathless dunes they usually patrol in couples, and some of their adventures in tracking down Bushman or Hottentot cattle-thieves in the heart of the desert would make most excellent reading.

Most of these chaps pooh-poohed the idea of a mine near their camp. "Pity you can't go into the Game Reserve," they all said; "that's where the diamonds are, out towards Tilrey Pan." But beyond the assertion and their evident belief, they had no data whatever to confirm what they said. They had all heard vague rumours as to rich mines existing there, tales, too, of Bushmen and Hottentots bringing out diamonds and obtaining cattle and waggons for them; but it was impossible to trace these stories to their source or confirm them, and beyond a flying trip or two when water had been too scarce to allow of any delay, they had seen but little of this forbidden ground themselves. A few of the nearer "pans" in that region lay within their patrol, and their description of the rocks and gravels to be seen there excited my curiosity to an extraordinary degree, whilst they were unanimous in saying that, from the high dunes they had visited there, numerous unknown and unvisited pans could be seen dotting the desert eastward. But this mysterious region, long coveted by prospectors, had for many years been closed against all prospecting, a tract of country

half the size of England having been proclaimed a Royal Game Reserve, to the exclusion even of travellers.

The old Bushman who had been my guide knew this district well ; in the past he had hunted ostriches there with the bow and poisoned arrow, bringing the feathers in to the rare trading waggons to exchange for tobacco and the like, and he asserted that Bushmen still wandered there, independent of water and living on the *tsamma* (or wild melon) in lieu thereof. " Bright stones," yes, some of the " pans " were full of them, and he also had heard that men had obtained many head of oxen and five waggons for these ! But which " pans " they came from he could not say ; there were many, many of such places. Yes, he knew pans where the soil was *blaauw* (blue) and crumbled in the hand, and where the *rooi blink klippers* (bright red stones—garnets) lay by the shovelful, and green stones too. Would he be able to take me to these places? Yes! and to where there was a " fontein " of good water too, but the police would put him in *tronk* if he went there ; no one was there but *schelm* Bushmen, cattle thieves.

All of which made me more anxious than ever to explore this forbidden stretch of country, and on our way back I took every opportunity that offered to question both natives and farmers as to whether diamonds had ever been found there, and found that the belief that mines existed there was universal.

Few of the farmers cared to acknowledge that they had ever been more than a mile or two into the Reserve (and then always after " strayed cattle ") ; but as a matter of fact a great deal of poaching is carried on by these dwellers on the border, and many a waggon of gemsbok biltong finds a way to dodge the rare patrols of the few police.

As we again approached the dry bed of the Molopo (which practically forms the boundary-line between the Reserve and the line of surveyed farms fringing the German border), I took several opportunities of penetrating for a few miles into the prohibited area,

to where, from a high dune, it is possible to scan the huge expanse of pathless desert stretching eastward, whilst from the rocky kopjes that here and there rise near the ancient river I was once or twice able to overlook it to even better advantage. And as far as the eye could reach, to where sand and sky met in the mirage and shimmer of the horizon, there was nothing but serried lines of enormous dunes, except where, here and there, flat open spaces, glimmering like lakes with the sheen of the mirage, showed the position of some of the larger "pans." Near many of these, I noted that the sand, reddish or dun-coloured in general, was snow-white; a feature that also struck me was that the position of each of these sand-encircled spaces was invariably marked by the proximity of an exceptionally high dune, towering well above its neighbours. Seen at sunrise this vast expanse presented a most extraordinary appearance, the position of each "pan" being marked by a dense low-lying cloud of mist, which of course dispersed as the sun gained in power. Altogether it was a most fascinating stretch of country, made doubly so by its being forbidden ground, and by repute a region of great mineral wealth.

And abundant evidence was forthcoming that these stories of diamonds in the desert were not without foundation, for in many places along our more leisurely route homewards we came across carbon, garnets, oblivine, and all the usual accompaniments of the precious stones, whilst in more than one instance well-defined "pipes" were pointed out in which "yellow" and "blue" ground—practically identical with that of the Premier Mine—was disclosed in dry watercourses; and there can be no doubt that a very large number of these Kimberlite occurrences await systematic prospecting.

But as we approached Upington again, the few inhabitants we questioned no longer referred to the "Game Reserve" as being the whereabouts of diamonds; instead, they universally spoke of a spot in quite another direction.

As their tale ran, in substance, an enormously rich mine was discovered many years ago in the wild tangle of almost unknown mountains known as the Noup Hills, which lie on the northern bank of the Orange River below the Great Falls and the Molopo, and which few white men have ever penetrated. In the early days of Kimberley, a Hottentot had told his master there that he knew of a place where the diamonds lay thick, and eventually this digger had undertaken the long trek, and after incredible hardships had found the spot and made himself a rich man in an hour or two. But he barely escaped with the diamonds and his life, and so terrible had been his experiences that nothing would induce him to return.

The tale, though differing in detail, was always substantially the same, and whether true or not it is certainly believed in by the bulk of the inhabitants of the southern part of Gordonia, and indeed I have since had abundant reason myself for believing that it has a foundation of fact. Now, some years ago, Brydone, the well-known writer of South African stories, wrote a most thrilling one around this incident, which he published under the title of *A Secret of the Orange River*, and which gives a most accurate description of the little-known region in question ; so accurate, indeed, that the author had certainly either visited the spot himself or taken the description first-hand from one who had.

It has been maintained that the story had no foundation of truth and originated solely in the fertile brain of the writer ; but this I can in no wise credit, for there are men in the district who had heard it long before Brydone wrote his book, and indeed who had never heard of the latter.

And in Upington, when we arrived there, an enthusiastic friend of mine declared that he could produce a man who knew the actual spot, and who had long expressed a wish to lead a properly equipped expedition to it.

Unfortunately, this man was not to be found at

the time of my return ; but even during the few days that I remained in Upington I was able to gather a lot of data that seemed to confirm the story, and my desire to visit the Noup Hills now equalled my longing to enter the Game Reserve.

However, nothing could be done till certain guides were forthcoming and other matters satisfactorily arranged, so, leaving my local friend to hunt up all the information he could about diamonds in either locality, I left Upington for Prieska on New Year's Day, 1910, consoling myself with the reflection that, though Anderson had led me still another wild-goose chase, it might not have been absolutely in vain.

CHAPTER VII

KLEIN NAMAQUALAND—RICHTERSFELDT—PORT NOLLOTH AND THE "C.C.C."—STEINKOPF—WONDERFUL NAMAQUALAND FLOWERS—TREKKING TO RICHTERSFELDT—FLEAS !—MONOTONY OF THE COUNTRY—MOUNTAINS IN SIGHT.

WHILST discussing ways and means for investigating the fascinating regions I have just described, something occurred to set my thoughts entirely in another direction. This was nothing less than an opportunity of exploring the lower reaches of the Orange River, and the miniature Switzerland of untraversed mountains bordering them, known as the Richtersfeldt Mountains. Over the vast mission-lands in that region a syndicate had obtained certain rights, and as the country was reported to be richly mineralised I was sent up to examine it, and thus given the chance I had so long desired.

For here, as I have already mentioned, Stuurmann, whom we had met at Luderitzbucht, had seen such wonderful gravels, full of "crystals" that might well have been diamonds. Apart from its diamondiferous possibilities, the northern position of Klein Namaqualand immediately adjoining the Orange River has long enjoyed the reputation of being very highly mineralised ; but owing to difficulty of transport and various other reasons, its mineral wealth has remained practically unexploited, and the region only known to the very few.

As far back as 1838 Sir James Edward Alexander, F.R.G.S., published an account of an *Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa*, which he had carried out under the auspices of the British Government and the Royal Geographical Society during the previous year, and during which he had explored

the lands adjoining the southern bank of the Orange River for some 200 miles from the mouth. He was shown many rich deposits of copper by the natives, and so struck was he by what he saw that a year or two later, in London, he formed a company having for its object the exploitation of this new source of mineral wealth. Sir James's scheme included the utilisation of the Orange River during the flood season for the floating down of ore, in flat-bottomed barges, to a wharf near the mouth of the river, and thence by waggon transport to one of the small bays near for shipment oversea; or the alternative of smelting furnaces near the river, fuel being obtainable from the thick, luxuriant belt of timber on either bank.

Definite information as to operations carried out some seventy-odd years ago are hard to obtain, but some attempt was certainly made to carry out this scheme, ore being actually floated down the river and shipped from Alexander Bay, Peacock Bay, and Homewood Harbour; all within a few miles of the Orange River mouth, and at all of which the ruins of substantial buildings, boatslips, etc., standing deserted to-day on the lonely shores, bear eloquent testimony of this period of activity of a bygone day. But the venture was premature. It was before the days of steam; the ore had to be towed out by ship's boats; the prevailing wind, which blows with extraordinary force all along this coast, must have been a great obstacle to the rapid handling of ore, and the consequent delay was probably one of the principal reasons for the abandonment of the scheme.

However, the prospecting carried out had proved many of the deposits to be extremely rich, and some years later development work was started in several places by different syndicates, with excellent results, and a certain amount of ore was again shipped from Alexander Bay; but by this time a formidable rival had appeared upon the scene in the shape of the Cape Copper Company, who, with their own line of railway connecting their own copper-mine at O'okiep

with their own port at Port Nolloth, had already begun to exercise that influence upon the affairs of Namaqualand that has lasted up to the present day.

Adverse circumstances thus again proving too strong for these budding copper ventures, the country once more became deserted, the actual locality of many of the abandoned workings remaining known only to a few among the Hottentots who form the scanty inhabitants.

It was with a view to locating and examining as many of these mineral deposits as possible, as well as keeping an eye on the prospects of the diamonds that Alexander and his followers had never dreamed of, and also to finding a route between them and the bays near the Orange River mouth, that I landed at Port Nolloth in August 1910, having made the voyage in the s.s. *Hellopes*, and having arrived in a thick fog the very twin brother of the one that hid everything on my previous visit there. However, by midday the sun had got the best of it, and we were slung overside in a big basket, dumped into a waiting lighter and towed ashore.

I was a bit curious to see Port Nolloth, for I had heard a good deal about it, and the mournful sound of the bell-buoy had engendered a somewhat mournful anticipation, which I may say fell far short of the reality.

A long row of low shanties, mostly of corrugated iron, almost level with and facing the sea, on a narrow path won from the desert of white powdery sand stretching behind it ; not a tree, bush, or sign of vegetation except the bright hues of the cherished pot plants adorning the tiny stoeps of some of the dwellings on the "front," whose owners doubtless like to remind themselves that there are other things on earth beside sand and sea and the Cape Copper Company.

A fog almost every morning, chilly, damp, and all-pervading, mournful surroundings made more mournful by the incessant tolling of the bell-buoy rocking on the dangerous bar, the muffled crash of



GRANITE RANGE BEHIND KUBOOS, RICHTERSFELDT.



ENTRANCE TO A BAD PASS, RICHTERSFELDT.
Rausson in foreground.

surf on a sandy shore and the periodical boom of the detonator from the signal-station. Then, when Father Sol has vanquished mist and fog, an hour or two of intense heat, and the glare from white sand and burnished sea and sky sufficient to blind one; this again followed by the uprising of the prevailing wind, which, if kind, may for a time make life tolerable, but which usually means a change infinitely for the worse, a change to sand, whirling and driving in all directions, penetrating every house, every room, every orifice, choking and blinding one and making the bathless "hotel" absolutely unendurable.

The daily event the departure of the miniature train carrying coke to O'okiep for the smelting out of the copper ore, which the return train brings back in the shape of opulent "regulus" which, in pigs, bars, trucks, and stacks, lies near the landing-stage in hundreds of tons, ready for shipment to Europe to help swell the profits of that great *quasi* monopoly, the Cape Copper Company.

It is not my province to unduly criticise this important corporation, from whose officials, moreover, I have always received the greatest courtesy; at the same time one cannot but deplore the fact that the many millions profit it has made since its inception some forty years ago have done so little towards the general development of Namaqualand, and that their railway-line of nearly 100 miles should have tended so little to open up the surrounding country. Indeed, but for the wharves, tugs, and primitive facilities for shipping copper at Port Nolloth, the mine at O'okiep, and the railway, Namaqualand generally is little the richer for the "C.C.C." [1]

In order to obtain the necessary Hottentot guides for the expedition I had first to proceed to Steinkopf, a tiny mission station some seventy-odd miles up the C.C.C. line from Port Nolloth, and the headquarters

[1] This was written in 1910, when the mines were in full swing. To-day they are closed, the C.C.C. having ceased operations in June 1919. This closing down of the only industry in Namaqualand caused endless suffering to the wretchedly poor inhabitants, and was followed by a general exodus of the population.

of the Steinkopf and Richtersfeldt Mission-lands, upon which most of the copper deposits I wished to locate were situated; and as soon as I possibly could I finished my business in Port Nolloth and proceeded thither. Leaving at 8.30 one morning when the combination of fog, surf, and bell-buoy were more unbearable than usual, the tiny little engine laboriously hauled its long load of coke-laden trucks, together with a few antiquated coupé carriages of fearful and wonderful design and dilapidation, and dignified locally by the name of "specials," inland across a monotonous and level belt of sand which, arid and destitute of vegetation near the coast, becomes eventually covered with low bush, scanty at first, but after a few miles thick and luxuriant, and apparently excellent for stock-raising purposes. At "Five Miles," where there is the Namaqualand equivalent for a station, some iron tanks of goodly dimensions show from whence Port Nolloth draws its supply of fresh water, which is taken in in "water cabins" by train, and distributed about the town by a primitive system of water-barrels drawn by mules.

The mountains dimly visible from Port Nolloth are first reached at Oograbies, where abrupt sandstone kopjes of considerable height extend north and south from either side of the line. These, however, are but outliers of the formidable mountain range farther inland, which forms an abrupt barrier at Anenous, some thirty-five miles farther on. This place was for many years the terminus of the railway, the copper having in those days been brought down to it in waggons through difficult passes in the mountain. Here, as at several other spots along the line, there is a good supply of water; indeed, it appears that practically wherever water has been bored for in this so-called "waterless desert" it has been found at a very moderate depth below the surface.

Thence the mountains rise abruptly, the track ascending by tortuous curves and gradients far exceeding in steepness those of the famous Hex

River Pass, and climbing some 2,000 feet within the next few miles. The scenery is magnificent: mountain after mountain on either side, peak after peak, and range after range; near at hand the vivid splashes of bright-coloured rocks showing up in brilliant contrast to the green of the *melk bosch* (euphorbia) clothing the less precipitous slopes, everything startlingly clear and distinct in the brilliant sunshine and clear air of the mountains, the tawny hues of the peaks in the middle distance gradually changing to a blue, which in the more remote ranges became ethereal to a degree, till mountain and sky became merged in the bright shimmer of the horizon. Around Klipfontein are the corn-lands of the natives, and on the occasion of my first visit these "lands" presented a most beautiful and wonderful appearance. For field after field of cleared plateau and mountain slopes were ablaze with gorgeous colour, being absolutely covered with the most brilliant-hued flowers, not mingled in blurred and confused masses, but in broad and clearly defined stretches of different vivid colourings. Here, morgen after morgen of glorious crimson; there, half a mountain-side of mustard yellow, in startling contrast to the other half of azure blue. Parterres of lovely heliotrope, red-hot patches of scarlet and orange of every shade, of pink, of mauve, salmon, a hundred tints, and all so thickly clustered and luxuriant, so well-defined and separated, that the general impression was that of an enormous garden of wonderful carpet bedding. The veldt flowers of South Africa are justly celebrated for their wonderful beauty, but I doubt if at any other part of the sub-continent they can be seen in such gorgeous perfection as at Klipfontein on the Port Nolloth–O'okiep line.

The season for them is, however, but a transient one, and two months later, when I again passed the spot, not a blossom was to be seen.

A few miles farther and Steinkopf is reached; from thence the track winds on a down-grade across a wide, barren, desolate plain, broken by queer-

looking granite kopje, to where a high, humped mountain marks the position of the copper-mine at O'okiep.

Steinkopf consists of a mission church and buildings substantially built of stone by the natives themselves, a post and telegraph office, a store or two, and a scattered collection of miserable shanties and the circular mat huts of the natives. Flimsy as these latter are, they are infinitely preferable to the paraffin-tin built abominations usual to the locations, for they are not only more sightly, but they can easily be moved when sickness or a prolonged stay upon one spot has produced the usual awful state of sanitary affairs.

The Hottentots are miserably poor ; they depend upon a few poor flocks and herds for a living, together with a precarious harvest which want of rain cheats them of. Year after year their scanty corn-lands on the slopes of the mountain, where rain is most likely to fall, have been ploughed and sown, and a promising crop has again and again sprung up, only to wither and die for want of rain long before reaching maturity. This had happened time after time at the period when I first visited the place, until no corn remained for the people to sow, the seed having been eaten to keep them from starving. There was no work in the district, the supply being greatly in excess of the only demand, namely that of the C.C.C., and present conditions rendering it almost impossible for " outside " mining ventures to work the many known mineral deposits in the vicinity at a profit.

The rain had evidently been widespread, and its fall relieved me of the anxiety I had felt about the scarcity of water on my coming trip, for which I was now able to make final arrangements. My visit had been timed to coincide with the missionary's periodical trip to the remote mission station of Kuboos, in Richtersfeldt, where once a year the nomad Hottentots forming that community gather for *nachtmaal*, and this would be the most favourable

opportunity for meeting the guides I needed. All being arranged, I returned to Port Nolloth, where I met S. Ransson, my companion for the trip, a tough and seasoned prospector whose recent two years on the diamond-fields of German South-West had turned him into a sort of salamander, with a hide like biltong, and a positive liking for a diet largely consisting of sand and "brak" water. With him came the whole cargo of stores necessary for such a long trip, for we had been warned that the country we were going into was practically a land of famine. The few inhabitants—Hottentots and Bastards of the Richtersfeldt Mission-lands—are wretchedly poor, practically existing upon the milk of their few cows and goats; they very rarely slaughter an animal, and are very reluctant even to sell one; they grow nothing whatsoever except a few patches of corn on the mountain-tops near Kuboos, the harvest of which, when they are lucky enough to reap one, is only sufficient to last them a few months; and when milk fails and grain is finished they exist upon a few edible roots and the gum of the thorn-trees growing on the banks of the Orange River. And as we expected to employ a fair number of these natives, and would have to feed them, it came about that, roomy as the waggon proved, its capacity was taxed to the utmost, and its team of sixteen sturdy oxen had plenty of collar-work before they got through the belt of heavy sand that stretches for miles inland from the sea.

The team, with its Hottentot driver and *voorlooper*, had come three days' long trek from Kuboos to Port Nolloth to fetch us, and to our dismay we learnt from them the grave fact that, contrary to our expectation, the heavy rains that had recently fallen in the Steinkopf district had not extended to Richtersfeldt, whither we were bound, that the water-holes were dry, and that the oxen had not tasted water during the three days of intense heat that the journey had lasted. Not that they appeared inconvenienced; indeed, these Namaqualand cattle

run the camel close in their ability to go for long periods without water, and their nomad owners are thus able to "run" them over tracts of veldt far distant from the precious fluid, caring little so long as they can get them to water every third or fourth day. To a minor degree this faculty is also shared by the few ponies bred in the country and called locally *boschje kops*, wiry little animals with a good deal of Basuto blood in them, and perfect marvels for endurance. I have on more than one occasion ridden one of these ponies three days without being able to give it a drop of water, and have seen it, when grass failed, and every bush was burnt dry with the awful sun, contentedly chewing the sapless twigs from the bushes that an ordinary goat would disdain, or apparently thriving upon the dry fallen leaves beneath the trees in the scorched-up river-beds.

The waggon track to Richtersfeldt leads north-east from Port Nolloth, and after a few hours' trek the sand veldt becomes thickly bushed, *melk bosch*, *zout bosch*, and many other fleshy-leaved aromatic and resinous shrubs densely covering the long, undulating slopes of heavy sand, the sad monotony of dark grey-green being unbroken except by an occasional lily-like flower of a brilliant scarlet; no sign of life anywhere, the silence unbroken except for the crack of the whip or the yell of the driver, the sand effectually deadening the sound of the wheels and the tread of the oxen. As we wished to see the whole of the country we were travelling through, we trekked only by day, quite contrary to the general custom of the country in the hot season; and as the intense heat made it impossible to move during a considerable part of the day, our progress was of necessity slow. The country was quite uninhabited and we saw not a soul during the first day; but towards evening we were overtaken by some five or six Hottentot women with a perfect mob of children, who, it appeared, were also bound for Kuboos.



FEEDING THE HUNGRY AT THE STEINKOPF NATIVE MISSION STATION, LITTLE NAMAQUALAND.



HARD PULLING IN THE HALGHAT RIVER KLEIN, NAMAQUALAND.

190[illegible]

They were frowsy and filthy and poverty-stricken to a degree, and in a weak moment, having pity on one poor old bundle of rags who was carrying a baby and seemed hardly able to get along, I motioned her to get up on the waggon box, and later, when two or three pot-bellied little imps clambered up beside her, I hadn't the heart to turn them off. Then —it being late afternoon of a terrifically hot day, and the waggon going smoothly through the soft sand—I stretched out and fell asleep for a bit.

My dreams were interrupted by a terrific blow on the nose, and I awoke with a yell to find a small but extremely odoriferous youngster sprawling across my face, having fallen from a perch which he had evidently taken up on our piled-up belongings behind us ; each box or bag or sieve was occupied by others : one of them had on my new pith helmet and nothing else—the whole waggon, in fact, was filled and festooned and overflowing with them. On the box-seat now sat four frowsy old hags smoking, spitting, and clucking like a barnyard full of hens, whilst the atmosphere . . . ! A sudden jolt of the waggon threw another youngster across Ransson's *embonpoint* —much to my gratification—but he merely snored a bit louder. I, however, felt myself quite unequal to the occasion or the odour, and scrambling out of the waggon, I gave them best and walked. We outspanned in the middle of the track, the native drivers on these lonely treks seldom troubling to draw aside from the beaten path. Glorious are these Namaqualand nights, the soft, velvety blackness of the seemingly limitless veldt, above the great solemn blinking stars, looking double the size they appear through the denser atmosphere of the South, and making one feel very small and wormlike.

There is an abundance of fuel in the shape of dry bush almost everywhere in Namaqualand, and that first night of our trek our fire blazed brightly nearly the whole night, the natives huddling near it and clucking and cackling in their extraordinary " click " language, men, women, and quite small children

passing from mouth to mouth the native-made soapstone pipes, filled with their loved *tabaki*. These pipes are peculiarly shaped, being a straight tube like a very large cigar-holder, and often the more primitive natives simply use the hollow shin-bone of buck or sheep.

We slept in the waggon, or rather tried to, and as we turned in Ransson commented on the extraordinary monotony and lifelessness of the country so far. "No life," said he, "no game, nothing to shoot at, neither buck nor bird, no snakes, no insects even!" He was still grumbling when I fell asleep—but he was wrong! I have a sleeping-bag, and usually, when I am once inside it, it needs a cyclone to wake me before daybreak; but that night the paucity of insect life in the surrounding country was accounted for by the fact that they had all got inside my bed, and appeared, moreover, to resent my presence. For a few minutes I dreamed that I was being used as a garden roller over a bed of stinging-nettles, then I woke to find myself squirming and writhing in an absolute bagful of fleas; not the decent educated variety, mind, but Namaqualand fleas, belonging to a land of famine and bent on making up for it while the chance lasted. I was out of that bag in quick time, but the whole waggon was phosphorescent with fleas, and through it all the other chap snored. He afterwards said that I was the best man he'd ever been out with; whilst I was around every flea in the vicinity left their homes to follow me, and he could sleep in peace, but personally I think they knew what they were up to when they left him alone. . . .

I finished the night outside, my only idea in sleeping in the waggon having been to avoid the dew, which on the coast-belt is often extremely heavy, and which accounts for the dense belt of low bush. A tramp through it in the early morning on the look-out for a shot means being saturated, every bush and plant being soaked with brilliant dew-drops. Doubtless this helps the animals that feed there to

exist so long without water, sheep in particular; indeed, I have been assured that in certain parts of the veldt thereabouts lambs often go for the first six months of their lives without ever seeing water, and have no notion as to how to drink it when first brought to a pool.

The end of the second day's wearisome trek brought us to Daberass, where, in a wild, rocky ravine amongst rugged kopjes, we hoped to find water for the oxen; but the deep hole scooped in the sand was scarcely damp at the bottom, and we thanked our lucky stars that our own water-barrels were holding out well.

The hills bordering the ravine (which is the dry bed of the Holghat River) were soon passed, and another wide expanse of bush-covered plain came in sight, on the far side of which, as far as the eye could reach, extended a range of bold and fantastic peaks.

There was no sign of the herds of springbok which are at times found on Richtersfeldt, a few *paauw*—very wild and quite unapproachable—being the only signs of life; there was nothing to prospect but sand, or an occasional outcrop of white, barren and "hungry"-looking quartz, barely worth turning aside to look at; and I sat on the waggon box and looked at that distant line of blue peaks and wanted those mountains bad! That was before I got to them, mind. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

RICHTERSFELDT—ALEXANDER BAY—MOUTH OF THE ORANGE RIVER—"HADJE AIBEEP"—HELL'S KLOOF—A DESERTED COPPER-MINE—ROUGH GOING—A MAGNIFICENT VISTA OF PEAKS—AN OLD GOLD PROSPECT.

THE fourth day found us at Springklip, a solitary hill near the mountain range, where, between two outlying granite peaks, a few waggons, and here and there a mat hut, marked the spot on which the Hottentots were to assemble for their annual *nachtmaal* (communion).

There was no sign of a permanent settlement; indeed, with the exception of Kuboos, a day's trek farther on, where there is a tiny stone-built mission church, these nomads have no fixed village, trekking from place to place as water and grazing dictate.

During the whole of our four days' slow trekking we had not seen a solitary human being, but now the natives could be seen coming in from all directions: parties of two or three men mounted on wiry little ponies, and followed by their women and children on foot; others mounted on powerful-looking riding oxen, saddled with horse-saddles of obviously German make, and significant of the loot brought from the farther side of the Orange River by the many refugees who had followed those doughty Hottentot fighters, Witbooi and Marengo, in the Hottentot rebellion; rickety waggons and weird-looking carts tied together with bits of riem and kept together by a miracle; others driving ponies laden with bloated and repellent-looking water-skins from the nearest water-hole at Doornpoort, some ten miles farther on among the mountains, to which spot our poor oxen had to be driven before they could quench

their four days' thirst. The natives soon came flocking round our waggon. They seemed a dejected, harmless, invertebrate lot of beings, with very little character except an inveterate habit of cadging. Tobacco was their great desideratum, but it was noteworthy that, greedy as they were for it, they invariably shared anything given to them. They were all cleanly-looking, and though their clothing was in many cases a miracle of patchwork, no rags were to be seen.

Mr. Kling, the missionary, arrived that night, and the following morning Ransson and I set out to visit his waggon, about half a mile from our own. Although waggons, carts, and huts had considerably increased in numbers since our arrival, not a soul was to be seen, and the missionary's waggon was likewise deserted ; but from a huge erection of fresh bushes that I took to be a sort of cattle kraal I could hear voices. There appeared to be only two people speaking ; first would come a brief emphatic sentence in Dutch, then a reply in clicking Hottentot. To my limited intelligence it sounded as though Mr. Kling was sharply interrogating a native on some point, but, on strolling round the large and high enclosure to look for an entrance, we came suddenly upon line after line of kneeling Hottentots, silently and attentively listening. The " kraal," in fact, was a temporary chapel hastily built of bushes and filled to overflowing with devout natives, men on one side and women on the other, whilst at the far end, by an extempore altar, stood the missionary and a native in clerical attire, who was rapidly translating Mr. Kling's address into the vernacular, sentence by sentence, and apparently with force and effect.

I'll own we tried to bolt, but Mr. Kling called us, and we had perforce to walk up and sit by his side in our shirt-sleeves, facing four or five hundred pairs of curious eyes.

White men are a rarity in the Richtersfeldt, but surely not sufficiently so to account for the intense fixity with which these people regarded me ?

Ransson, whom I consider much more of a natural curiosity than I am myself, they appeared to ignore; every pair of eyes seemed to be riveted on me! For a moment I felt flattered, then I tumbled! They had never seen a *bald* white man before. Ransson told me afterwards that a ray of sunlight, filtering through the bush roof, struck right on the top of my cranium, and was reflected as though from a mirror; he also said they probably thought it was a halo I was wearing. But as he also spread the quite unfounded yarn as to his having found a hen ostrich sitting on my head one morning when we were sleeping in the desert, and evidently taking it for a long-lost egg, I think his statement can be ignored.

Meanwhile, the sonorous sentences went on, then came hymns sung with enormous fervour in the extraordinary "click," prayers and exhortations, whilst the birds fluttered in the bush roof above us, and the sun, now high in the heavens, flung broad blotches of gold through the open spaces on to the motley assembly facing us. And motley it was to a degree: tall, thin, spare yellow men with rudimentary noses, high cheek-bones, oblique eyes, and the Tartar appearance of the true Hottentot, sardonic-looking Bastards with aquiline noses and faces of a pronounced Jewish type, here a blubber-lipped, grinning Christy Minstrel, black as ebony, and all rolling eyeballs and gleaming teeth; there a big nondescript with red hair and a skin all piebald with huge freckles; by his side, and equally devout, the puckered physiognomy, all tattoo marks and wrinkles, of a pigmy Bushman.

This extraordinary race-mixture to be found amongst the so-called "Hottentots" of Richtersfeldt is to be accounted for by the fact that the lower reaches of the Orange River bordering their territory was at one time, and to a minor degree is still to-day, a sanctuary for refugees from every tribe in South Africa. Flying from justice or persecution, they sought this remote spot, intermarried with the

Hottentots, and have helped produce a tribe, or community, as heterogeneous as it is possible to conceive.

The following day Mr. Kling sorted out from among his motley flock the guides who were to take us to the many old prospects among the mountains, and after consideration we decided to send these men with the waggon and our heavy stores to Annisfontein, a spot affording the best starting-place from which to penetrate the tangle of mountains. Meanwhile, with a light cart drawn by six oxen, we proposed to visit the little-known bays on the coast near the mouth of the Orange River, thence working our way up the river-bank till we rejoined the waggon; and as the pace of the latter with its heavy load would be of necessity slow, we hoped by this arrangement to save a lot of time.

We started that night. Meanwhile the Hottentot encampment had broken up and the natives had dispersed in all directions, leaving the empty and deserted bush chapel alone marking the spot of their meeting-place.

The cart was a featherweight to the sturdy team, and trekking well into the night and again before dawn, we were in sight of the sea when the fog lifted in the morning; however, it was still far distant, and it was then possible to realise to what a height above sea-level the gently undulating plain had brought us. All day long, with but brief spells of rest, we trekked on, and the long glistening line of sea seemed as far off as ever. Two strangely shaped mountains, known as the "Buchu Bergen," were our objective, as we knew them to mark the locality of the bays. That night we again trekked late, and midnight found us under the black shadow of "Buchu Berg," with the thunder of the surf in our ears and the sweet perfume of the *buchu* bush making fragrant the cold night air. And cold it was—one of the coldest nights I ever remember. We had a bucksail with us, but the wind was so strong that we spent most of the night trying to hold

it down over the cart we were "sleeping" under, and I was very glad when morning came.

Directly below the steep face of Buchu Mountain we came upon the most perfect little boat bay imaginable, surrounded by high rocks and almost circular, but with room only for a few lighters and small craft; here the ruins of a substantial stone house still stand, and little piles of copper ore scattered here and there tell their tale of the past. South of the cove runs a long, shallow depression known as Homewood Harbour, little better, however, than an open roadstead. The whole coast is indescribably lonely and desolate, and, to add to its dreariness, scattered along the beach far above high-water mark lie piles of driftwood, the accumulation of centuries, tree-trunk piled upon tree-trunk to a height of 4 or 5 feet, and a belt of 10 to 15 yards extending for many miles. Many of them are the remains of big trunks 2 or 3 feet in diameter, and all of them are bone-dry and like tinder.

Turning northward, we tramped, hot and thirsty, around the long crescent-shaped indentation known as "Peacock Roadstead," the northern extremity of which is Cape Voltas, so named by hardy old Bartholomew Diaz, who landed there in 1486 and erected a *padrão*—a stone pillar surmounted by a cross such as these devout old adventurers usually hanked round with them, tokens of a pledge to the Pope that the salvation of the infidel was the principal object of their quest.

The headland is low and insignificant, and, as at Cape Cross, no vestige of the pillar remains, not even the hole it stood in. It is highly probable that Diaz landed at a small cove some distance from the point, where there are more ruins of a much more recent date, with a rude boatslip and many fragments of copper ore.

Following a coastline is tedious work, especially when one is extremely thirsty and when one feels compelled to examine the gravel for possible diamonds every few yards; and it was sunset when we reached

Alexander Bay, a nice little harbour with a good beach, sheltered by high rocks on either side, the entrance partly protected by a bar, and apparently easily convertible into a very snug little anchorage for the tugs, lighters and small craft necessary for the shipment of ore on a large scale. The numerous shell middens to be found on this uninhabited coast probably mark the site of Bushman or Strandlooper settlements of long ago, and it is likely that where these huge mounds of shells, fragments of pottery, etc., are to be found, water was at one time not far distant, though to-day there is not a drop to be found between the Orange River and the *brak* water-holes at Rietfontein, some twenty miles south.

Just beyond Alexander Bay we found our cart, the oxen outspanned and the natives as anxious for mutton and coffee as we were ourselves, and two hours' trekking with a bitterly cold wind in our teeth brought us to the ruined farm near the mouth of the Orange, where we were thankful indeed to get a drink again.

The mouth of the Orange River is simply a wide expanse of mud flats, interspersed with low islands, and here and there long, lagoon-like stretches of water. Most of these latter are stagnant and isolated, and it is only after tedious wading knee-deep in mud and water that a channel is reached which still moves almost imperceptibly towards the long sand-bar closing the actual mouth from bank to bank, and through (or under) which the river, in the dry season, percolates into the sea. Upon this bar the white Atlantic rollers were breaking, at high tide sending the salt water surging up the river several miles.

There was wild fowl in abundance. The mud flats were dotted with flamingoes standing in lines and companies and looking absurdly like soldiers; wild duck quacked till the whole place sounded like a huge poultry farm, and the "honk-honk" of beautifully plumaged wild geese made me regret that, with a laudable anxiety to do nothing unlawful, I had read up the list of protected game before

starting and knew I must not shoot them. Luckily, however, Ransson had not read that list. Apart from the wild fowl the spot is absolutely uninhabited, though I believe the German bank was at that time frequently patrolled. About two miles from the mouth stands an old ruined farm, with a stone-built kraal, whose walls of enormous thickness and great height speak eloquently of the turbulent times, less than seventy years back, when these lower reaches of the Orange were infested with native outlaws, who from their fastnesses on the many islands used to sally forth to pillage and ravage the neighbouring tribes in good old Border fashion. Both pillagers and pillaged have long since vanished—unless, indeed, my mutton-loving rascals from Kuboos were lineal descendants of those bolder robbers of the old days.

A few miles farther upstream we noticed a large number of horses running on the low islands and the river bank ; they were fine-looking animals, and appeared to be quite wild and untended. I afterwards found that they belonged to a Boer farmer living at a solitary farm called " Groot Derm " some distance from the river mouth, and who breeds them extensively, finding a ready sale for them among the Germans on the other side of the river.

For some distance upstream we found the river-bank flat, barren, and uninteresting, whilst bordering it extended a long flat stretch of coarse sand and grit much resembling the diamondiferous sands of the German South-West fields. Here, in common with many a spot along the coast we had left, were standing numerous old prospecting pegs, showing where a few enterprising spirits had " rushed " from Port Nolloth just after the discovery of diamonds at Luderitzbucht, and had pegged anything remotely resembling a " wash." They were disappointed in that they found no diamonds, but it is doubtful if anything like a systematic search was ever made by these " prospectors " except in one or two chosen spots.

Before reaching Groot Derm the banks became lined with a thick belt of vegetation, beautiful willows of vivid green, graceful mimosa thorn, many of them of great height, bastard ebony, and many other varieties of trees and shrubs, forming in places an almost impenetrable barrier to the water. Inland the country was becoming more broken and hilly, and from an abrupt bluff overhanging the water we were able to obtain a fine view of the river in both directions.

Westward stretched the long, flat lower reaches to where the ribbon-like channel lost itself in the numerous lagoons of the mouth ; before us lay a broad, placid sheet of calm, unruffled water with a typical *zee-coe-gat* (hippo hole) mirroring the abrupt cliff on which we were standing ; upstream the silver gleam of long lake-like stretches, broken here and there by the darker water of the rapids, and the whole extent in that direction fringed with a thick belt of luxuriant vegetation on either bank ; bush doves fluttering and cooing in every tree, small birds of brilliant plumage darting from branch to branch and glistening like living sunbeams, beautiful trees, beautiful water—in fact, a strip of Paradise running through a desert.

For the land behind us and through which we had passed, though bush-covered and capable of supporting stock, could scarcely be called by any other name, whilst on the other bank the enormous sand-dunes of German South-West stretch back from the belt of willows as far as the eye can reach, dune piled upon dune, into veritable mountains of glaring yellow, with not a vestige of vegetation to relieve their awful desolation.

It is a peculiar fact that there are no dunes of this description on the British side of the river ; sand of course there is, but it is covered in vegetation of a sort, and is good land compared to the fearful barren waste on the northern bank. A little higher up we came to the tiny farm of Groot Derm, surely one of the loneliest places in this land of loneliness !

For to reach a habitation upstream the farmer would have to traverse at least 150 miles of desolation bordering the tortuous winding of the river: west of him lay the desolate beaches we had just left, and the broad Atlantic; north spread the fearful thirst-dunes of German South-West; and south, his "next-door neighbour" at Port Nolloth was a good four days' waggon trek away.

The lonely little house was empty, its owner being away on his periodical trip for stores, and we therefore did not even outspan at this tiny frontier homestead.

A mile or so above the farm the rough cart-track left the river and we struck across sandy hills to Aries Drift, which we found deserted even of the few miserable Hottentots occasionally to be found there, living in miserable *pondhoeks* of leaves and branches, and existing on the milk of their goats, the gum of the thorn-trees, the few small fish to be found in the river, and the various weird odds and ends that figure in their cuisine.

This drift, mentioned by Alexander as a permanent Hottentot *werf*, we found to be a most deserted and dreary expanse of flat, barren land, composed of the extremely fine silt brought down by constantly recurring floods; and this deep deposit of alluvial soil has been worn into a labyrinth of channels in all directions, with thousands of little "islands" between them, which are covered with and partly held together by the intertwined roots of dreary-looking tamarisks. Each time I have been to the drift it has been blowing hard, and on this first visit the hurricane was carrying the powdery silt in swirling clouds in all directions. There was no shelter anywhere, for the Hottentots in the past have denuded the spot of all the big trees, and our outspan that night was a most miserable one. A temporary lull led to our attempting to make a fire, which had hardly got fairly going when a most fiendish blast scattered it in all directions, taking with it our pots and pans and half-burying us in clouds of silt. We



"KOKER-BOOMEN" (*ALOE DICHOTOMA*), RICHTERSFELDT MOUNTAINS.



A MOUNTAIN OF LACMATITE NEAR ZENDLING'S DRIFT, RICHTERSFELDT.

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had to stick it somehow, however, as we had let the cattle away in search of food ; it was bitterly cold, and what with being half buried in dust, as well as being half frozen, I was extremely glad when morning broke after a sleepless night and we could trek again. This time we turned south-east, away from the river and across a wide, undulating plain consisting principally of granite débris from the mountains we could now see, and where our waggon waited. Although to all appearances this plain, stretching gently upwards to the mountains, was unbroken, our attempt to cross it soon proved it to be cut into many places by deep, dry watercourses, the banks of which were often so abrupt as to make them worthy of being called cañons, and crossing them meant wide and difficult detours. These watercourses, sand-choked and dry, full of water-worn boulders of rocks foreign to the surrounding country, and all showing the enormous erosion by water that has taken place in the past, go to strengthen the general impression of the traveller that in the very remote past Namaqualand enjoyed a rainfall vastly in excess of that of to-day.

At length and after many tedious detours we reached some foothills of the huge granite mountains of Kuboos which formed a barrier in front of us, and here, by a tiny trickle of water beneath two huge outcrops of white quartz, we found the waggon awaiting us, and with it the full complement of "boys," guides, and oxen to take us into that same barrier. Formidable these mountains looked now we were close to them, so formidable that a careful inspection of them from this "kicking-off" spot made us wonder whether, instead of a waggon, we ought not to have brought an aeroplane!

We spent a day in rest and preparation, during which we visited the so-called "Cave of Hadje Aibeep," a natural wonder of which I had often heard, and which was situated about half a mile from our waggon at Annisfontein. By the few white men who have visited it this queer hole is sometimes called

the "Bottomless Pit," and the natives certainly have some strange belief about it, and avoid it as much as possible. It is a strange place, this Hadje Aibeep, a deep shaft going down abruptly into the bowels of the earth, about 15 feet in diameter, almost circular and nearly vertical. I had expected to find traces of volcanic origin, but there is nothing of the kind near the spot, though in the valley below there is a large amount of a sort of solidified mud, which may have come from some such blow-hole, which may probably have been the vent of a geyser. The most intelligent Hottentot among our guides, a man who spoke English well, told me that the literal translation of the name "Hadje Aibeep" was "The Unknown Place," but whether he meant the "unfathomable" place or the "mysterious" place I could not determine. He said it was believed that, long, long ago, men went down the hole and came out on the bank of the Gariep (Orange) River many miles away, and that, in one cavern they passed through, they found many "bright stones." Students of the Hottentot language, however, give another translation of the term "Hadje Aibeep," which, they say, relates to a form of ancestor-worship formerly practised among the natives. When any notable died, and was buried, each passer-by was obliged to add to a heap of stones piled upon his resting-place, and such tumuli certainly exist in many parts of the country, but there is nothing of the kind near this deep hole! Of course it may be that the ancestors were thrown down the hole, and the stones on top of them; in fact, this would be rather an obvious thing to do; but in that case there is still plenty of room for a lot more ancestors—and stones. Others believe the shaft is the work of man, and that at some remote period treasure was brought up from it, whilst still another legend connects it with the fabulous dragon-like monster, which the Hottentots still firmly believe emerges from its underground lair at night to ravage the land between the Gariep and Buffels rivers.

We sat round the rim of it and heard all these yarns,

and, of course, Ransson wanted to go down it at once. He appeared to have had a lifelong pining to interview a dragon; ancestors, again, had always been his pet hobby. I told him he would probably become an ancestor without undue loss of time, if he insisted on being let down by the clothes-line we had with us; and whilst he was pondering over this dark saying, I quickly sent one of the men back to the waggon, with instructions to hide it.

Returning to the waggon, we found that the horses had arrived; they proved to be three dejected-looking native mares, *bosje kops*, and were accompanied by a foal and young colt. The whole cavalcade looked more fitted for the knacker's yard than for hard work, and, knowing we should have to rely upon them solely as a means of transport when once we got among the mountains, I felt extremely dubious about them. However, nothing else was available, and we had to make the best of it; moreover, as events proved, they turned out wonderful little animals for the purpose we required.

Meanwhile the waggon was entirely repacked, for we were now preparing to enter a very different country from the one already traversed. Every available water-barrel and utensil was filled, for henceforth we should have nothing to rely upon but a few precarious rain-water pools for our further supply until the maze of mountains before us was traversed and the Orange River again reached; whilst everything that could fall off, or out, was lashed, strapped, or otherwise secured to the waggon, in view of the awful boulder-strewn stream-beds and rocky tracks that would be our only roads. We trekked next day at noon, straight up the dry boulder bed of the Annis River, the sixteen mountain-bred oxen pulling as one beast and keeping the trek-tow taut in spite of the huge boulders that threatened to overturn it every moment. Then a ravine opened in the mountain flank, and we gladly turned up an incline deep in sand. Up this gradient we trekked for hours between high bare walls of sandstone,

shale, and other sedimentary rocks, with numerous outcrops of barren-looking quartz. Winding steadily upwards, we outspanned about sunset on an open plateau covered with vegetation and studded with many of the queer-looking aloes known as *koker boomen* or "quiver-trees," and so named from the fact that the Hottentots and Bushmen at one time used the hollow bark of the branches as quivers. There were many kinds of euphorbia and fleshy-leaved plants of varieties new to me. In fact, these plateaux are in every way distinct from the plains from which we had climbed.

Our driver was certainly bent on getting as much as possible out of his oxen, for that night late we trekked again across the plateau to where a gap in the peaks pointed to a pass up a steep climb where loose stones and boulders hurled the waggon from side to side, till every loose article in it was jumbled up in hopeless confusion, and it seemed that no wheels ever made could stand the terrific jolting; then over a *nek*, to plunge down a slope so steep that the tightly screwed brake scarcely kept the vehicle from taking charge and running over the oxen in front of it.

Having been riding all day in an antiquated saddle which was patched and cobbled past all belief, and to enjoy sitting in which was a taste difficult to acquire, I had thought to rest a bit by riding in the waggon, and in spite of the jolting must have dozed a bit just about the time we began on the down-grade. Half dreaming, I heard the shouting and jabbering of the "boys" as they screwed down the brake, then I felt the waggon skidding and the back part tilting up, then we struck a rock, and the whole of the gear that the up-grade had collected astern came "forrard" with a run. A prospecting-pan ricochetted from my head with a bang, a rifle slipped from its slings and smote me amidships, a kitbag came lengthwise over my anatomy and pinned my legs down, and before I could struggle free a perfect avalanche of various other belongings overwhelmed me.

I tried to get free, I tried to yell loud enough for the driver to hear, but he, and every other blamed Hottentot, was yelling at the top of his voice, the big whip was cracking like a lively rifle-fire, and the skidding wheels were screeching and grinding and banging against obstructions with such a din that my feeble bleat stood no chance of being heard.

At last a lucky lurch threw me clear and I struggled up beside the driver. It was pitch-dark, but we appeared to be going down a precipice full of loose rocks that threatened destruction at every yard.

"Solomon," I yelled in his ear, "you must be off the path."

"Nie, baas," he jerked out between his yells to the oxen.

"Then," said I, as the front wheels rose over a big boulder, and came down with a terrific crash on the rock below it, "get off it!"

I'm not sure if he did, in fact I'm not sure of anything that happened during that mad toboggan except trying to hold in the avalanche of fallen gear inside the waggon; but after an interminable but by no means dull time, we hit bottom somewhere, and outspanned in a dark gully, but on fairly level ground. I wanted coffee badly, and, groping round, I soon had plenty of dry bush for a fire. Then I couldn't find the matches, and I remembered that, as usual, I had lent them to Ransson, who used to principally live on them. But I couldn't find him, and call as I could there was no answer. The "boys" had outspanned and gone off with the oxen; and though we had matches by the gross, all my groping in the darkness and devastation inside the waggon failed to find one. After a while I got mad and commenced pulling everything out and dumping it in the gully; it would have to come out and be repacked, anyhow! And at length I found the overturned "scoff-box" and in it matches and a candle.

After that I found Ransson; he was quite at the bottom of the pile, a tin of golden syrup had oozed out of the scoff-box all over him, but he still slept

tranquilly and was considerably annoyed when I woke him up. I wish I could sleep like Ransson!

We repacked that waggon at dawn, this time double-lashing everything, for the driver warned us we should soon be at the end of the good path!

Although we had passed over a formidable range of mountains, and an open valley widening to a plain lay to the left of us, we soon found that our mountaineering was just beginning. For, emerging into open ground, we turned abruptly to the right and headed straight towards a precipitous range that made the mountains we had lately crossed look like excavations.

Northward the ranges opened out, and across open country we could see through the shimmering heat the long dark line of dense vegetation bordering the Orange at Zendlings Drift, and again, beyond, many a lofty peak of faint, exquisite blue. And now, rough as it was, we could see that the track we were following had been worn by many a waggon-wheel, and our guides explained that the copper ore from the "Numees" mine in the mountains ahead of us had been brought to the sea over this very road.

As our way led close to the deserted mine, we resolved to visit it, knowing, however, that it was still held under lease and could not be pegged. We hoped to find water there too, but in this we were disappointed, a few reeds growing in a hollow of hard-baked mud being all that remained of the water-hole from which the miners had once drawn their supply. This was by no means encouraging, as it might well be that the water-hole at the spot we were first bound for would also prove a failure; and as we had before us a particularly difficult pass known as "Hell's Kloof" before we reached that spot, it was obvious that we had better push on without delay. So the waggon was hurried forward and, keeping the ponies back in charge of a "boy," Ransson and I explored the mine. A considerable amount of development work has been carried out at Numees, adits having been driven into an abrupt mountain of

quartzite in and around the dry ravine at its base. The ore is principally bornite and "peacock ore," beautiful in its bright iridescent colouring, and gorgeous samples were easily chipped off the walls of the dark, cool drives. A great deal of rough ore lies at the mouth of the principal drive. Numees appears to be rich, and will probably add its quota to the world's copper-supply in the not far distant future. Here I saw for the first time the strange and extremely rare succulent *Pachypodium namaquanum*, known to the Hottentots as *half mense* (half men), which is peculiar to the country, and is only found in a few of the more inaccessible parts of the mountains. It attains a height of from 6 to 8 feet, its fleshy, branchless trunk being covered with sharp thorns and surmounted by a crown of green leaves about 9 inches in diameter. The native maintains that this head always inclines to the east, but the plant appears to be something of a *girasole*, inclining to the sun as the sunflower does. The trunk is often the girth of a man, and the effect of these solitary, erect figures against the bare background of rock is such as to render their Hottentot name of "half men" very appropriate. The plant was first discovered by Paterson, and described by him in his *Voyage into the Country of the Hottentots* about a century ago. I brought back two of these rare plants on each of my trips. Two were given to Dr. Marloth, the famous botanist, one of which, I believe, he presented to Kew Gardens, and the other to Professor Pearson of the South African Museum. These were, I believe, the first live specimens ever brought to Cape Town.

Having explored the mine, we started after the waggon, and soon found ourselves in the formidable ravine known as "Hell's Kloof." Our unshod little native ponies made light of the rugged track, hemmed in on either side by precipitous peaks, and until we overtook the waggon we were inclined to think that the difficulties of this particular part of the trek had been much overrated. But when we came in sight

of the waggon we realised that what was fairly easy going to lightly laden ponies which could climb like goats was very heavy work for a long and weighty waggon. In the distance at times the oxen looked like flies crawling up a wall, then they disappeared over a ridge, and shouts, yells, and a fusillade of whips showed the kind of toboggan they had struck on the other side.

In many places the rise was so steep that it had to be taken literally at the run, for once having lost momentum the whole outfit must have gone over and over till it hit the bottom. Still, by great effort and even more luck we managed to get to the top of the Kloof, and I think the oxen and "boys" were nearly as pleased as we were—not quite, perhaps, for they did not know, as we did, that over a hundred pounds of dynamite and box after box of detonators were among the stores in that waggon!

Even at the summit the sun had sunk, but beyond the pass we had just climbed the western sky was still ablaze, and silhouetted against it were innumerable peaks of every shade of mauve and violet grading into deepest purple. It was magnificent, and I sat down on a rock and gazed and gazed, and was still gazing when Ransson, who has no soul, came along and asked me what I was mooning at. I waved my hand to the celestial pageant: "Drinking it in," I said shortly—I don't like being talked to when I feel like that. He said, "Yes, I'm thirsty too; but you ought to be kicked for talking about drinking when we're 200 miles from any beer!" As I said before, Ransson has no soul.

That night we put in three hours' more hard trekking, starting at moonrise, winding in and out peaks and always keeping at a great height, skirting deep gullies and precipices, floundering over stony slopes where the wheels dislodged big boulders and sent them bounding and leaping hundreds of feet down into the black depths of the Krantzes below. The need for haste was imperative, for the oxen were thirsty, and should we find no water at our destina-

tion they would barely get back. A cold outspan in a cloud of driving mist, and we were glad to move on again before sun-up. By eight o'clock we were bumping and skidding down a mountain-slope to where, far below, wound a tortuous silver ribbon of dry sand that once had been a river. On every hand rose mountains, and beyond these more mountains.

I don't know how the waggon got down, for I took the rifle and cleared on ahead on foot, and I was hard put to it in places to keep my footing.

But get down it did, in a very short space of time, and wonderfully little the worse for wear, considering the battering it had had on Namaqualand " roads." An hour's trek beside the sand and we came to our destination, a few brilliantly green willows, rising from the dry river-bed, marking a natural camping-place, and the spot where gold had been found many years before.

CHAPTER IX

GOLD CAMP—THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS TO ARIEP—TATAS BERG AND COPPER PROSPECTS—A "MOUNTAIN" OF COPPER—THE GREAT FISH RIVER—THE "GROOT SLANG"—ZENDLING'S DRIFT.

HERE, if water allowed, we intended making a permanent central camp from which to start our real business of prospecting, but the question—and the question above all others in these mountains—was water. Anxiously we followed the guide as he scrambled up over a ridge and into a ravine about 200 feet above our halting-place. To our consternation we found the much-desired water-hole to consist of nothing but a small pool of stagnant rain-water, teeming with animalcules, and barely sufficient to last ourselves and the "boys" a week, over and above the scanty supply in our casks. Our guide had described the place as a sort of lake (!) with *banja water*, and he appeared hurt to think that this little hip-bath full of alleged liquid did not come up to the glowing description he had given us—so there was no more to be said !.

The position was serious. Our oxen and horses had had no water since leaving Annisfontein, two days before ; they had worked terrifically, and their flanks were hollow with thirst—for though they can go for four days without great discomfort over an easy trek, it is a different thing when they have been called upon to achieve the wellnigh impossible. And certainly they could not slake their thirst here. So we hurried back to camp and decided at once that they must be sent back to where they had last drunk, though probably some of them would never reach there.

But after a long and excited palaver among the

"boys," one of them intimated that he knew of a water-hole only a few hours away, and that it was a *fontein* where there was plenty of water and grass for the oxen. And so we sent him off with the poor thirsty brutes, hoping he would prove less of a romancer than the other chap, which luckily he did.

Evidently spurred by this good example, Klaas Zwartbooi, the wildest of the lot, and almost a pure Bushman, came clucking around us like a broody hen, and led us to understand that he also knew of water quite near us! We followed him, and sure enough, in another rocky catchment amongst the wilderness of peaks, we found a second tiny pool. Ransson was pleased, and gave Klaas a plug of tobacco he had no further use for, and this stimulated him to further efforts; for after another severe scramble, and in the most unlikely-looking spot imaginable, he brought us to still another apology for a water-hole.

Klaas was not a witch-doctor for nothing, and I feel sure that, if we had only had a pound of strong plug tobacco to tempt him with, he would have found us a nice little private bar and some iced lager-beer in the next gully.

Anyway, there was clearly enough liquid in the vicinity to keep us going for some time, and so we scrambled back to camp, pitched our tent, unpacked our waggon, had the first square meal for days, set our roust-about to make bread, and got ready for real prospecting.

Many years ago, in one of the gullies close to this spot, a number of gold nuggets had been found. These had been brought into Port Nolloth by a Hottentot, and white men proceeded to the spot. Still more nuggets were found, and eventually the magistrate of the district, Mr. W. C. Scully, the well-known writer, is said to have proceeded to the spot and verified the discovery. But owing to its inaccessibility and want of water it was never proclaimed a gold-diggings; and though an occasional white man had made an attempt to find gold there since, no one had succeeded. Still, it was obvious

to us that nothing but the veriest fossicking had been done there, and we had hopes.

So day after day we cleaned and scraped hole and hole of the water-worn gully ; carefully panning the stuff in a bathful of our precious water, using the latter over and over again, and losing not a drop ; and still we could not find even a " colour " of the precious metal. In the mountain slopes above there were outcrops of quartz in all directions ; most of these, however, were of white, glassy-looking stuff, and showed no signs of being mineralised ; but day after day, after our failure in the gullies, we tested these systematically, separating, going off in different directions with a little food and a prospect-hammer, and a boy carrying a bag, and bringing back heavy loads of samples, to be laboriously pounded down to a fine powder with pestle and mortar, and as laboriously tested—and still no trace of gold. Minerals there were in abundance—copper especially. In all directions the rocks were discoloured blue or green with it ; here and there the quartz was speckled bright with the silvery-looking crystal of molybdenite, in more than one place we found rich galena ; yet, though these diverse minerals were to be seen almost everywhere, in no case were they in sufficient bulk to warrant extensive work being done on them. Samples, samples, everywhere—though one or two huge cappings of hæmatite were well worth going through to see what kind of a pie their thick crust covered ! It was wearying work after a while, when the hope of finding gold became less and less, hard work that tore hands to pieces with the sharp razor-like splinters of the quartz, the scorching sun turning the rocks so hot that they blistered one, and all around a glare of sun, sand, and barren mountain-sides that made one's eyeballs burn as though they were being slowly roasted. And except for our few " boys " in the gullies near the camp, an absolute silence, unbroken except for the occasional scream of a *dassie vanger*, as the big eagles are called that sweep round the slopes of the peaks in search of an unwary rock-rabbit. Bird

life and animal life were very scarce ; though on the higher peaks the chamois-like *klip bok* was plentiful, and would have afforded good sport had we been there for that purpose ; but we were after gold, and contented ourselves with " cookies " and the tinned food from our stores. Of human beings we saw none ; indeed, we had not seen a soul except a solitary native at the little farm at Groot Derm since we had left the *nachtmaal* meeting at Springklip.

At length, having failed utterly to find a single trace of " pay dirt," we decided to lay bare the whole bed of the sand-choked " river," below which the reputedly rich gully emptied itself, by doing which, if gold existed there in a free state, we should find a trace of it. But the labour entailed would be considerable, and as the water was none too plentiful, we decided to leave the " boys " to do the rough part of the work whilst we made a rapid trip to locate and peg certain important copper deposits two days' ride away towards the Orange. We took two guides with us, and this time carried everything we required on our horses—food, water, sleeping kit, tools, dynamite, gun, rifle, etc., being festooned about the little nags in a most extraordinary manner. Ransson looked exactly like the " White Knight " in *Alice*, and the clatter of the frying-pan at his saddle-bow was martial to a degree. I had just complimented him on this when the tea-kettle at my crupper got loose and went one better ; then the prospecting-pan on the pack-horse joined in, and for a time we sounded like a whole troop of travelling tinkers. The baboons came out on the rocky peaks and hooted us, and Ransson, with fine repartee, hooted back.

The track led up and across bare rocky ridges and along precipitous slopes where a goat could scarcely have found foothold, and at times I felt much like climbing off and leaving the ironmongery to the pony's mercy ; but the little beasts were so careful, so surefooted, that I soon realised I was safer in the saddle than I should be on foot. They seemed quite tireless too, and when, after four hours' climbing and

clambering, we halted on a high grassy plateau, they appeared as fresh as ever.

The wide open space was beautiful with flowers, and there was plenty of food for the horses; but we made only a very brief halt, as we had planned to reach the Orange River that evening, and had only brought the barest ration of water from our limited supply at camp.

All the morning the heat had been great, and it was now terrific; the bush on the plateau was too stunted to afford any shade, and we were glad to get going again. This plateau was really a divide—a small tableland—about 3,000 feet high, and from it a veritable Switzerland of mountains could be seen stretching in all directions. We were accustomed to mountains by this time, but those ahead of us were so weird-looking as to appear absolutely unreal! We had passed range after range already, but in most cases the gullies, and even some of the slopes, had been covered with vegetation of a sort—queer, fantastic plants and cacti—but still vegetation! But these queer peaks were stark and bare and of the most startling colours. In serrated lines they stretched out like the teeth of a saw, and their crumbling slopes of rotten schist were of every shade of red, of brick-red, of flaring vermilion, of bright orange-red, in fact of every red-hot gradation of colour. And across their flaming flanks, in startling contrast, were drawn long broad bands of intense black, sharply defined in huge zigzags, and looking as though they had been scrawled across the scorching landscape by an enormous pencil.

Between these strange peaks "ran" rivers of glaring white and yellow sand, and riding through this uncanny goblin-land the weird stories of huge snakes and monsters told us by the Hottentots seemed no longer impossible. The whole land seemed dead, burnt up, absolutely devoid of life; not a bird or other living creature was to be seen anywhere, though the spoors of *wilde paarde* here and there in the sand showed where mountain zebra occasionally

roamed. For hours we rode down and down the slopes till at length we entered a wide stretch of bare sand flanked by mountains; this also gradually sloped and narrowed till it became a tortuous defile, on either hand of which towered abrupt and red-hot looking cliffs. The heat was appalling; it struck back from glaring sand and rocks as from a furnace, and I was soon parched with thirst. We knew there was plenty of water a few hours ahead of us, and I for one was thankful for the knowledge. For nothing accentuates thirst like anxiety as to when it can be quenched, and luckily we felt none.

There was not a sound, for the soft sand deadened the footfalls of the horses as with drooping ears they trudged dejectedly along, hour after hour, winding and turning through narrow *poorts* where two could not pass abreast, flanking mountains only to find others barring our path, always descending and always getting hotter and hotter. In places, scrambling over huge masses of iron ore fallen from the black zigzags above, or tempted to clamber up to some bright deceiving outcrop of adamantine iron-glance, or to where the numerous green stains on the red rock showed the existence of copper; walking as much as possible to save the poor nags' unshod hoofs, and only climbing to the saddle when our own feet became unbearable, we plodded and shuffled for five solid hours down that infernal ravine. I asked Klaas if it had a name. He said, "No," that it was not a regular "path," and that he had only been through it once—many years ago, when he was a boy. Time went on, and the course became so tortuous that at times we appeared to be doubling on our tracks; each of the peaks we passed looked exactly like the others we had already passed, and I began to think that Klaas was leading us in a vain circle! By-and-by we came to a big rock of crushed-strawberry colour with vermilion trimmings, and Ransson called Klaas back. He said, "Look here, Klaas; we've passed this blamed klip six times already! Now, you may think this funny, but we

don't, and I'm going to mark this pebble with my hatchet, and if we pass it again—there'll be trouble."

Klaas must have seen that we were not to be trifled with, for we didn't pass the rock again after that, and in about a week—Ransson says it was the same evening, but I know better—we suddenly emerged from a narrow gap in the rock . . . and there, within a hundred yards, lay a glorious shining stretch of beautiful water bordered by a broad belt of luxuriant trees; and a vivid lawn of velvet turf extended almost to our very feet!

No transformation scene could have been more dramatically sudden . . . we had been riding through an inferno and suddenly here was Paradise!

The poor nags spurted at the welcome sight, and within a couple of minutes our scanty clothing was off, and we were up to our necks in the water and letting the whole of the Orange River run down our thirsty throttles.

The place is called "!!Ariep!!" the notes of exclamation representing the Hottentot "clicks" that Klaas put into the alleged word. I told him I was glad to hear it, and would take his word for it sooner than go back. It really is a most beautiful spot; the river is about a quarter of a mile wide, and upstream takes a majestic bend. In that direction it is dotted with islands covered with trees and dense undergrowth, and is a favourite spot for the few hippo still to be found in the Orange. Downstream there are rapids which, though they look very innocent, are not to be trifled with, as I found later. Opposite, on the German bank, the mountains are as bare and highly coloured as those we had passed through. Indeed, "Red-hot Valley," as we called it, is but one of scores in this region, where, strangely enough, the peaks near the river are all devoid of vegetation. The schistose rock of which they are principally composed seems to be suffering from dry-rot, for it crumbles at the slightest touch, and in climbing a whole avalanche is eternally clattering down from underfoot.

Here and there a few ghostly-looking *koker boomen*, or huge twisted *Candelabra euphorbia*, looking like huge spiders, cling to a precarious footing, and that is all.

The night of our arrival was a night of absolute luxury, with soft green sward for a bed, the twinkling stars above reflected in the long mirror-like stretches of the river, and the murmur of the rapids for a lullaby which we didn't need.

Next morning we started upstream, for the best part of the day skirting the narrow belt of vegetation, clambering over huge piles of débris at the base of abrupt cliffs, where the belt narrowed to a few clinging bushes, and the river swirled directly below us ; at other times, when the bed widened, losing sight of the river for miles and miles, and finding it next to impossible to burst our way through the tangled virgin growth. There was no vestige of a path, though here and there we came across a fallen and rotten trunk, or a lopped branch, showing that an axe had once cut a way there. That day we were shown three different spots where shafts had been sunk on prospects many years ago : all within a short distance of the river ; indeed, it was obvious that copper was to be found almost everywhere, the blue and green stains showing up in all directions on the rocks bordering the scorching sand-rivers.

A few days in the defiles of the "Tatas Bergen," and without going far from the water, satisfied us as to the copper prospects, and we returned to ! ! Ariep ! ! to locate a further spot which Klaas knew of, and of which we had great expectations. The samples he had shown us were of beautiful bornite, and if the spot only came up to the sample, it would mean something exceptionally good. Alas ! we did not then fully realise what a queer mixture of intelligence and stupidity the average Hottentot or Bushman is ! For, leading us downstream for half a day's hard trek, Klaas ultimately landed us at a spot where the mountains receded from the river-bed, and the latter widened out into a boulder-strewn stretch of water-

worn débris a mile or more in width. And here, in a patch of alluvial gravel, sand, and pebbles, he triumphantly pointed out two or three small fragments of bornite, the remnant of a water-borne fragment that he had found there, and smashed up on the spot! This was his copper-mine, and he seemed quite satisfied with it. There was nothing to show where it had come from: some bygone flood had brought it down—the veriest bit of jetsam. Words failed, for we had come all the way from Tatas Berg for this! Indeed, it had been one of our principal reasons for leaving the waggon. Meanwhile Klaas sat on his haunches and grinned and clucked, and held his old pipe out for *tabaki*, and was evidently quite pleased with himself. I started to tell him a little of what I thought of him, but realised that it was a bit beyond me. Then I saw Ransson picking up the rest of the "mine," and I turned to him. "Oh, don't be an ass!" I said. "Throw the . . . stuff away—throw him away too! What are you going to do with it, anyhow?"

"Make him eat it!" grunted Ransson—and judging by Klaas's appearance a little later, I believe he did.

"Ou Ezaak," the other Hottentot with us, now came forward with the information that he knew of another spot where there was an abundance of copper. It would mean a long day's trek to the south, but we could return to the waggon that way. He assured us that it was a "mine" where, as a boy, he had worked with white men.

With the awful example of what had happened to Klaas well before him, he still persisted in his assurance of what we should find if we followed him, and we therefore turned back upstream without further loss of time, for our stores were wellnigh exhausted. There was a moon, and we trekked late, leaving the river by a side-ravine, winding and twisting between abrupt peaks, and always rising. By midnight we were almost clear of the mountains, and off-saddled for a few hours. There was not a vestige of food for the horses, nor a twig or bush to make a fire with.

We were bitterly cold, and after vainly endeavouring to sleep, were glad to be moving again. Crossing a low rocky ridge, we emerged upon an almost level sandy plateau, with a few isolated peaks here and there, and made our way for some hours towards a peculiar-looking kopje, jet black, and looking as though made of shining anthracite coal. Around it lay thousands of tons of titaniferous iron-sand, and, turning its base, we found an entirely new panorama. A wide sand-river stretched away to the south, and the peaks beyond it were quite different in appearance from those we had traversed. They appeared to be tilted quartzite ; in places the bedding was clearly defined, in others tossed and contorted in a most fantastic manner. Striking across the plateau, we almost immediately came upon a small herd of springbok, the first we had seen. We needed fresh meat badly, and after about three hours of the chase, in which the buck displayed considerably more knowledge of the locality than we did, we still needed it.

It was terrifically hot, we were dog-tired and thirsty, and the mirage was so strong all around that we could not always tell whether there was one buck or twenty, or whether they were a hundred yards away or five hundred. But that was not our reason for abandoning the chase.

Ransson sat down on a red-hot rock and mopped his brow. " Look here," he said ; " after all, these poor little things have done us no harm—why should we shoot them ? "

I agreed, and explained that I had been merely shooting near them, just to see their antics when the bullet struck, and had not dreamed of hitting them ; also that we'd better leave off in case we did.

" Yes," agreed Ransson, " we'll chuck it—anyhow we've no more cartridges ! "

So we trudged on for three hours after the horses, which were already miles ahead.

This country was almost as weird as that which we had passed through on our way to the river. We

were apparently skirting the base of a mountain of coal, jet black and glistening; the sands surrounding it were also black, but they were not coal, but titaniferous iron-sand, which I tried in vain for gold. This queer-looking peak was principally composed of hornblende, and here I also noticed huge crystals of black tourmaline, as thick as one's wrist. At length, tired and footsore, we reached an ancient river-bed actually rejoicing in a name. "Ganna Gulip" old Ezaak called it, when we found him waiting for us with the horses under the poor shade of a few tamarisks—the first vegetation we had seen all day. Here âlso there were a few clumps of rushes, and the "boys" were busy scooping a hole in the sand with their hands. At about three feet, the bottom became moist, water began to ooze in, and we soon had enough for a kettle of tea. Meanwhile the horses had gone down the bed to a small open pool. I went and looked at it, but it was a squirming mass of animalcules, not fit even to boil; though, a month later, I was glad to drink the little that was left of it. We stayed at the sand-scooped hole, not to rest, for it was too hot to sleep, but patiently collecting enough water as it oozed in by the spoonful to fill our water-bottles, for Ezaak told us we should get no more till we reached the waggon, and we had two formidable ranges to cross before then. As a matter of fact, we could have drunk the whole supply as fast as it became available, for the heat that day was phenomenal—it seemed to be drying the very blood up in our veins, and converting us into biltong. Not far from this water-hole we came upon the first trace of man we had seen for many days, a faint old waggon-spoor in the sand. It led towards the fantastic peaks to the south, and Klaas told us that the vehicle had passed through some six months previously, on its way to a mass of native copper which had been discovered among the mountains there. We followed it for a short distance only, and, turning up a branch-ravine, came to the old prospect Ezaak had told us of, and which, luckily for him, was far too big to eat!



THE DEEP GORGE, 500 FEET OR MORE IN DEPTH, IN WHICH THE ORANGE RIVER IS PENNED BELOW THE GREAT FALLS.

By the time we had pegged the spot it was sunset, and a debatable point whether we should camp there and ride early next day, or try to cross the mountains by moonlight. We had eaten our last scrap of food at midday, and there was no vegetation for the horses to nibble, so we decided on the latter, though we knew we were taking risks, for Ezaak seemed none too sure of the path, and crossing pathless mountains by moonlight is scarcely a picnic. Rummaging in our depleted saddle-bags, we found a last pinch of tea, plentifully mixed with tobacco dust, and with it we brewed a kettleful of the most obnoxious fluid I have ever tasted. The water was *brak* (alkaline) and thick and slimy, and we had no sugar, but we got down a hot beakerful each, and started on one of the coldest rides I have ever experienced. For on the bare, sun-blistered uplands of Namaqualand there is practically no intermediate stage between intense heat and intense cold, and less than an hour after sunset my teeth were chattering and my hands so numbed I could scarcely hold the reins. Naturally, the higher we climbed, the colder it became, and I soon regretted that I had not decided to wait hungry, and do that ride in the warm sunshine. I had nothing on but a khaki shirt and pants, of the thinnest—just enough to keep the sun from flaming me—and though I had a blanket strapped on the horse, it was useless trying to wrap that about me in such a scramble as we were in for. It soon became evident that Ezaak was relying on his sense of direction to bring us to the waggon, and occasionally he was absolutely at fault. In and out among the solemn peaks we scrambled, here plunging into dark ravines, where it was impossible to do more than grope one's way, then emerging into a blaze of white moonlight that showed every pebble in the path as clear as noonday. Once or twice, in the darker places, we had to retrace our steps, as we found the way barred by rock or precipice, and often the only warning that we were on dangerous heights was the crash of a dislodged stone or boulder falling into the depths

below. But " Ou Ezaak " still scrambled on, till, after passing over two distinct ranges, we found ourselves again amongst thick vegetation, and here our experiences became even more variegated. For most of the bush was of the *wachteen-beitje* variety, full of hooked thorns, and as the little nags wriggled through it, it ripped and tore skin and clothing from us in the most impartial manner. It blew great guns too, and but for sheer shame I would have called a halt, lighted a fire, and waited for morning. However, Ezaak was now fairly in his stride, and after an interminable time, and when I had resigned myself to being utterly lost, we suddenly plunged down a dark ravine, and saw a fire twinkling below us. It was the waggon, right enough. We had been scrambling for seven hours. In the morning we found that a dozen or more Hottentots had pitched their mat *pondhoeks* close to the waggon. They had a flock of goats with them, and appeared to live entirely on the milk. We bought a little of it later, giving tobacco and tea in return. They had a great idea of the value of their commodity, and doled it out very sparingly. Their fondness for tobacco is extraordinary, the women and young girls smoking quite as much as the men, and passing the hollow leg-bone of a buck, which serves them as a pipe, from lip to lip, as they squatted by the fire.

They had two riding-oxen with them, fine-looking beasts with a rein passed through the nostril to guide them by, and saddled with ordinary horse-saddles of German military pattern. We used them on several of our excursions later, finding them excellent, both for pace, endurance and climbing powers, which they possess to a remarkable degree.

With all this addition to the population, it was clear that the water would last only a few days ; in fact, we were hard put to it to enable us to " pan " the cleaning up on the section of river-bed which the " boys " had bared for us. Still, we managed somehow, the remains of the water in which we had " panned " for gold all day serving us for making

coffee at night ; but in spite of all our efforts, we found no particle of gold, and reluctantly decided to abandon the spot, coming to the conclusion, at the time, that we had been shown the wrong spot, and that the gold had never been found there.

Before leaving, however, we finished our exploration of the surrounding peaks, finding numerous traces of other metals, but no gold. As an instance of the variety of minerals scattered through this region, I may state that a single stick of dynamite in a faint splash of carbonate of copper disclosed more than a hundredweight of bornite, with galena, an essay of which, in Cape Town, gave 38 per cent. of copper and 24 oz. of silver to the ton, whilst within a fifty-yards radius, fine samples of molybdenum, hæmatite, and copper-glance were found, and the sand-rivers were black with hundreds of tons of titaniferous iron-sand. Many of the rarer and lesser-known metals are undoubtedly present also in this region, tantallite being frequently met with in the sands and amongst the hæmatite débris, and the very large crystals occasionally met with point to the probability of large deposits of this valuable mineral awaiting systematic search. The ravines of this wild and remote spot were full of a beauty peculiarly their own, being luxuriant with vegetation of strange form and colour : *Varias euphorbia*, huge fleshy-trunked succulents, with brilliant scarlet flowers, aloes of different shapes and colours, and above all, a most glorious copper-coloured bush, known locally as the "Pride of Namaqualand," all contrasting vividly with the milk-white of the quartz, and the brick-red of the red-hot-looking schist. Here of all places, the strange *Pachypodium namaquanum* is abundant, and reaches a size I saw nowhere else : moreover, many of these giant succulents, of 10 feet or more in height, were many-branched instead of consisting of a single trunk, and may possibly be a different variety. Of animal life there was but little. On the higher peaks, the chamois-like klipbok could occasionally be seen standing on an isolated point

and tempting a long shot, but in the valleys a few leopards and wild-cat, a slinking hyæna or jackal, were all that were ever seen.

Just before leaving, a Hottentot came in riding an ox, and claimed through an interpreter that he knew of the whereabouts of a " mountain " of copper, rumours of which I had heard from various sources before. A certain German prospector named Preuss—a man whose word I absolutely believe—had told me that some years back he had endeavoured to trek through these mountains from the vicinity of the Great Fish River—which runs through German South-West—into the Orange. Some natives had guided him; it had been an exceptionally dry season, and they had nearly died of thirst, but in a remote spot he had come upon a whole mountain of copper ore. He wanted water more than copper, and had no licence anyway, so he made no attempt to peg it, but he told me of it in Cape Town, and gave me the names of the Richtersfeldt natives who had brought him through. I had made inquiries from the Mission, and this chap was the first result. He gave us his name, but I cannot reproduce it—it sounded like a hungry man swallowing oysters. Anyway, he said he could guide us to that mountain, and that it was three days' trek away, so we rationed him, and made him happy with tobacco, and prepared to trek. A man was sent away to bring in the oxen, which were grazing some days away; the waggon was left in charge of Peter, with instructions to meet us at Zendling's Drift fourteen days later; and with scant rations in our saddle-bags, we started off again, under the guidance of the ox-rider. His route led us back to the Orange—a few miles above where we had struck it before, but through quite a different series of ravines, in which we again came upon numerous copper indications, all of which we ignored, in view of the " whole mountain " of it to which we were being guided.

But alas! our guide turned out to be a bigger romancer than Klaas Zwartbooi, for after two days of hard trekking, he landed us at a little patch of

green carbonate the size of a tea-tray, and solemnly pronounced this to be the spot we were looking for!

We had passed at least a dozen better prospects *en route* without taking the trouble to turn aside from the path! This was heart-breaking, and I never felt more homicidal in my life. We could get nothing out of the brute: he spoke no word of any language but the "click," and old Ezaak's (our other guide) few words of English and Dutch were quite unequal to the occasion.

So we retraced our steps to the river, with the intention of following its tortuous course to Zendling's Drift, where we had been told Preuss's guide was living—for this man was plainly an impostor. That night we spent by the solemn, lonely Orange, bathing and revelling in the cool water to our hearts' content. We had brought but very little food with us, hoping for game; but we came across nothing, and regretfully resorted to the unsportsmanlike practice of putting a stick of dynamite in one of the deep pools, in the hope of getting some fish. About half a dozen little chaps the size of small herrings (a variety of *springer*) was the only result, and they were so absolutely full of bones as to be quite uneatable. We grilled them, and tried to imagine they were trout, but the only thing good about them was the smell!

A moonlit river is always beautiful; the Orange (possibly because of its contrast with the wilderness of barren and forbidding mountains through which it has burst a way) seems incomparably so.

Before turning in, I walked up the bank to a beautiful grassy spot, where I could see for some distance, and sat down, and looked at the majestic sweep of the water upstream. There was not a sound, for the nearest rapids were miles away, and not a ripple disturbed the mirror-like surface of the water, as the big volume of it swept slowly by, from the black, towering portals of the Tatas Berg mountains in the far distance. Above that gorge for at least a hundred miles its course is almost unknown, as for miles it is penned into a cañon between precipitous cliffs.

It was all very tranquil and lonely, and I lay on the sweet turf and smoked, and pondered on the fact that, with the exception of Ransson and the guides, there was probably not a soul within many days' journey. It made me feel quite sentimental, and I thought of the crowded towns I had known, and the crowded bars . . . and the beer. . . . Then I heard a concertina . . . ! and I wondered if the sun had been too much for me. A concertina ! here, in the most solitary spot imaginable !

It appeared sheer lunacy, but there was no doubt about it, and I got up and cleared back to camp, prepared for any old thing. Ransson was sitting by the fire, smoking, and before him were capering two little stark naked Hottentot "boys," imitating the antics of monkeys—in fact, dancing the so-called "baboon dance" of the Bushmen.

But the musician ! He was away ahead of the gaudiest buck-nigger I had ever seen ! On his head was a German uniform "smasher" hat, about three sizes too large for him, and covered with sweeping ostrich plumes, a tight-waisted, wide-skirted uniform coat was left open to show what had once been a very *décolleté* white waistcoat, which in turn was finished off with a broad athlete's belt of red, white, and black. Then his costume ended till you came to his feet, on which he wore a brand-new pair of glaring yellow elastic-sided boots, with spurs ! Oh ! he was a peach, and he knew it. His concertina was also German, spangled beyond belief, and quite new. He only used about three notes of the considerable number there appeared to be on it, but the Guards' Drum Major, Sarasate, Paderewski, and several other virtuosi rolled into one could not have approached that buck-nigger for style. After a while we got him to stop his music and talk. He spoke a little alleged English and Dutch, and several German cuss-words, and led us to understand that he had been working in German South-West some months, and had now decided to retire and get married. We wondered where the lady was, and gave him some

tabaki and wished him luck, and he cleared off. But we had scarcely got to sleep when that infernal concertina started again, and there was " His Nibs " back again, with the two " coryphées " capering away for all they were worth, and evidently prepared to keep it up all night. The more *tabaki* I gave them, the more energetic they became; the more I swore, the more they seemed to think I appreciated their efforts; and at last I had to turn out of my blankets and go for them with a sjambok. Then only did they quit, and I turned in again. But I had got a big thorn in my foot, and when I had got that out a scorpion got into my bed, and objected to my being there. Altogether, a nice, quiet, idyllic night by the river.

In the morning, the musician turned up with a tin full of goat's milk, and informed me that he knew a magnificent copper-mine close at hand, and wanted us to pay him for showing it. As he pointed in the direction we were going, we took him along, and, as I expected, he led us to an outcrop that we had pegged on our previous visit.

He then danced about six steps, played a pæan of joy on his infernal concertina, grinned from ear to ear, and held out his hand. " 'Undred pounds," said he. " *Duizand pond, Zwanzig mark!* " He got it.

We gave him a plug of tobacco, and a little tea for his bride, and he stood on a peak and played us out of sight. He was certainly the most cheerful and original Christy Minstrel I ever met in a wild state, and I remember him with gratitude.

We now made our way down the river towards Zendling's Drift, finding but little difficulty for the first day or two. The banks were mostly densely wooded; at places this belt of virgin vegetation was half a mile or so in width, in others the abrupt flanking peaks crowded in upon the stream, leaving but a narrow belt of vegetation clinging to their base. There was plenty of grass for the horses, pigeons for the pot, and dassies (rock rabbits) for the " boys." Skinned, they looked like rabbits, and smelt very

nice when cooking, but I could not bring myself to taste them. Though small birds were plentiful, and there were wild duck and geese in abundance, and monkeys and baboons galore, we saw no trace of larger game here by these solitary reaches of the Orange; if we except the splashes of some large animals in the pools between some of the numerous islands, which the "boys" assured me were hippo.

These latter, of which there are but a very few left in the Orange, are usually found on the islands near where the Great Fish River joins the larger stream, after running for hundreds of miles through German South-West.

We passed this spot on the second day, and here saw the first sign of former habitation, two or three abandoned *pondhoeks* made of branches, long since dry and leafless. And here we came upon stretches of fine sand and gravels which showed signs, here and there, that they had been worked superficially, doubtless for diamonds, for there were the gravels that Stuurmann had told me of in Luderitzbucht, and, as he had described them, they were sparkling with "bright stones"—pretty but worthless crystals.

We found no diamonds, but we had not the means for systematic sieving, and some of the old river terraces near this spot looked very promising indeed.

The mouth of the Great Fish River, where it debouches into the Orange, is choked with a huge accumulation of sand, through which, after rain, the water finds its way in various small channels to swell the larger stream. There are numerous small, well-wooded islands in the vicinity—these were the haunts of the hippo already alluded to. The spot is one of the wildest and most remote and difficult of access of all spots in this deserted region; even on the German bank there is neither settlement nor habitation within many days' trek in either direction.

Our leisurely and easy trek downstream now came to an end, for just after passing the Great Fish, we came to a bend where the mountain converged upon the river, the course of which became tortuous in the

extreme; and at length an apparently impenetrable barrier of peaks stretched before us, through which it appeared impossible that the river could penetrate. And then trouble began. In places we scrambled for hours along precipitous slopes, cumbered with fallen rocks, and with swirling rapids below us; a mile or so of easier going where the country was more open, and again a mountain spur would shoulder the river aside. This time the abrupt slope would be dense with high and tangled thorn-bush through which we had to cut a way, whilst here and there a huge fallen rock or a whole landslide from the cliffs above would bar further progress, till we had crawled round, over, or under them, at imminent risk of breaking our ponies' necks or legs, as well as our own. At times we were obliged to descend into the actual river-bed, and had the water not been low, these traverses would, of course, have been impracticable, and a sudden freshet upstream would certainly have accounted for the lot of us, had the flood caught us in one of these spots.

The worst going for the ponies was over these places, for the huge rocks and boulders were rounded, slimy, and slippery with mud, exactly like boulders on a sea-beach at low tide.

But, to me, the biggest nightmare of a spot was where, on the steep slopes of a mountain rising abruptly from the water, a big drift of sand rested. I do not know at what angle sand will rest, but certainly it was steeper than 45 degrees, and dry and loose. We could not get above it, for there the cliff was vertical, and the men warned us that we must keep going as fast as possible, as to stand still a minute meant being half-buried, and slipping down with the sand to the swirling water below. The ponies would scarcely face it, and were plainly scared out of their wits, and I did not like it myself.

But there was no alternative, and no time to stay and think about it, for it was nearly dark, and we could not stay where we were, whilst about a mile ahead we could see open ground and grass. I don't

know how we managed that mile; it was one wild flounder and scramble, a case of plunging through loose, shifting sand up to one's knees almost, dragging a frightened pony behind, and always climbing upwards as well as forward, to compensate for the slipping-down of the whole bank of sand.

I was heartily glad when it was over, and though I have crossed that sand-slide twice since, I have always funked it.

It was dark when we floundered out of it, and we steered straight for a wide thicket of willows, made a big fire, and were only too glad to turn in. It seemed an excellent camp, with wood, water, and shelter from the cold wind, but it was plain that the "boys" were uneasy, and they crouched close to our fire instead of building one apart as they usually did. After some food Ezaak suggested that we might perhaps trek on a little farther, and this, coming after a most arduous day, was decidedly strange. We asked him why, and after beating about the bush for a bit he told me that in the middle of the river, and exactly opposite where we were camped, was a big rock in which the huge snake (the "Groot Slang," in which every Richtersfeldt Hottentot firmly believes) had his home, and that it was not safe for us or for our horses.

We had long heard of this snake; many reputable Hottentots and a few white men claim to have seen it, many more have seen its huge spoor in the sand or mud—a foot and a half wide. It is believed to take cattle from the banks, and the natives fear it mightily. There are no crocodiles in the Orange, and, besides, there are never any traces of feet with the spoor, but it is a remarkable fact that the Hottentot name for this huge python—or whatever it may be—is "Ki-man," which is very like the Eastern name for an alligator.

Anyhow, we were far too tired to care for snakes, and of course stayed where we were, the only thing to annoy us being the huge long-legged tarantulas that kept running with incredible swiftness into the

fire, where they sizzled, squirmed, and smelt unpleasantly.

In the morning we found that the river here was a long, wide, still, and apparently very deep stretch of water, and that a big rock rose from the centre, as the guides had said. It appeared to be of granite, and was riven in half by a big cleft. The steep mud banks of the river should have shown a trace of anything coming from the water, but we found no spoor. So we made up some dynamite cartridges with fuse and detonator, and flung them out as far as we could, and stood by with the " arsenal " handy in case the " Groot Slang " was at home and objected. The dynamite made a big upheaval, but no snake materialised ; only a few small springers and barbel flapped round in the muddy water.

Then I saw something moving in the crack in the rock, and let drive with my rifle. I was in a hurry, and I heard my bullet hit the landscape somewhere in German territory; but Ransson had seen that movement too, and was emptying his magazine into the crack without undue loss of time. When we'd finished a very flustered and indignant old wild-duck squatted out of that crack and went away unhurt and quacking most derisively. No luck again with our " big game " shooting.

A hard day's trek again and we left the river, climbed up a sandy incline between hills of black hornblende schist where faint wheel-marks showed that we were on an old beaten track, and cutting across country, at about ten at night we again came to the river at Zendling's Drift. And the crowing of a cock, and the barking of a dog from the other bank, were as music in our ears, for the loneliness of this deserted land was beginning to tell upon us.

Scarce was our camp fire blazing when we heard a great shouting and splashing in the river below, and three or four Hottentots came across to find out who we were. They were working for the German police, who had a post on the further bank. The splashing and shouting is always done by these Hottentots

when crossing the river at night—for fear of the "Groot Slang." They have no boats, but at various places along the banks long dry logs may be seen lying with a peg driven in on one side. These poles they use to help them in crossing, holding the peg and pushing this primitive raft before them.

CHAPTER X

ZENDLING'S DRIFT—JACKAL'S BERG—THE RESULT OF TOO MUCH WHYMPER—HUGE NUGGET OF NATIVE COPPER—A DIFFICULT PASS—KUBOOS—DEGENERATE NATIVES—BACK TO PORT NOLLOTH.

ZENDLING'S (Missionary's) Drift received its name from the fact that the first missionaries to enter Damaraland crossed the Orange at this spot. There is no kind of settlement on the English side, and at the time of this first visit of mine the Germans had not commenced building the substantial police post that now commands the drift, their few police being encamped among the trees some distance from the river. The whole river, by the by, has always belonged to the British, whose territory extends 100 yards above high-water mark on the northern bank.

Having seen no other white men since we left Port Nolloth, and feeling sociable, Ransson and I swam the river with an idea of paying the Germans a visit, but I felt shy when I got out of the water, and sat down well within British territory. Ransson, however, had brought over clean pyjamas in a bundle on his head, and clad in these he coolly sauntered off to the camp, where, I believe, they turned out the guard and signalled to Warmbad for reinforcements. He turned up later with some nice biltong, and for the rest of the day did nothing but brag about the beer and schnapps he had been regaled with. He also most considerately breathed upon me now and then, and altogether I did not come off so badly.

The country near Zendling's Drift is open and sandy. Upstream and some distance away from the river there are some extraordinary river-terraces of great height, on the flat surfaces of which sun, wind,

and sand have combined to polish the beautifully coloured pebbles of ironstone, jasper, agate, chalcedony, and other stones in the most wonderful manner.

These ancient gravels gave great promise of being diamondiferous, and here and there among the pebbles a huge water-worn crystal would bring our hearts into our mouths with its perfect resemblance to a rough Koh-i-noor; but we had no means of working the gravels with us and found no diamonds. We questioned our "boys" about diamonds—they had heard vague rumours of those at Luderitzbucht, and they spoke of a big one that had been sold at Steinkopf years ago for many cattle.

Just above the drift on the German side there is a remarkable and beautiful mountain called by the Germans the "Lorelei." It is triple-peaked, like a Bishop's mitre, and affords a striking background to the placid stretches of tree-fringed river below it. Behind it, northward, the ranges are exceptionally high and rugged. Southward, on our bank, there is a tract of several miles of country covered with an absolute maze of quartz outcrops, literally thousands of them, but mostly hungry and barren; and in the mountains behind them there are many old copper workings, mostly dating from the time of Alexander's venture, but some, far more ancient, the work of Hottentots, who used copper hammers and gads for their work. But by far the most striking of all the mineral outcrops that this sterile and desolate region affords is to be seen about a mile below the drift, where the river twists abruptly round a hog-backed, precipitous hill some 800 feet high. This hill is known as Jackal's Berg, and from the southern spur of it there outcrops a most wonderful reef of hæmatite. Huge black blocks of it, each of many tons in weight, have rolled down the slope into a valley of pure white quartz adjoining it, and the effect of the glaring contrast of colour in the strong sunshine is remarkable. The reef extends for many miles, the ore is extremely high-grade and with a very low percentage of sulphur, and will some day be of great value.

Near this reef, and a few miles lower downstream, there spreads a region of comparatively recent volcanic activity, a gruesome wilderness of scorched scoriæ, calcined shale, and schist, with innumerable outcrops of iron ore, all absolutely barren of any trace of verdure, dead and desolate as one imagines the craters of the moon. And below this the tangle of trees and bush bordering the river was an absolute jungle that we tried in vain to break through, and here in a patch of bare sand I saw more leopard spoors than I had ever seen before.

Thus, riding out each day in a different direction, we spent some time at the drift waiting for our waggon, living on the few things that fell to our guns—bush doves, a hare or two, and a still rarer klipbok, grilling the flesh on the ashes and eating it without bread, salt, or any other sauce but hunger to make it palatable, for the few stores we had brought in our saddle-bags were long since exhausted. Each evening Hottentots came over from the German camp, but we could get neither stores nor news from them of the native we had hoped to find there—the guide to the lost copper mountain.

Apart from our shortness of stores, our anxiety for the arrival of the waggon was accentuated by the fact that we were literally in rags, for we had nothing but the clothes we stood in, and thorns and sharp rocks had torn them to ribbons ; moreover, the fierce heat had played havoc with our *veldtschoens*, which had to be cobbled every day with fragments of rimpi, and which had assumed such dimensions that they would no longer go through the stirrups. But at length the waggon turned up, having had a terrific time in Hell's Kloof, and having been patched and cobbled till it matched our boots.

I now learnt from Peter that the guide we were looking for had gone to stay at Kuboos, and I therefore sent a message in, with a spare horse to bring him back.

Four days later he turned up ; a tall, elderly Hottentot of grave and important aspect, who

announced himself as being the one and only veritable guide to my copper mountain. His manner was so impressive that again I had great hopes that he might be telling the truth. He kept aloof from the other "boys," expected—and obtained—better rations than they did, and altogether appeared to be a pillar of strength. But all our questioning was unavailing; he would take us to the spot, but would tell us nothing as to its whereabouts except that we should have to return upstream.

We had been bitten badly before, and as he understood Dutch we painstakingly explained to him that it was our custom to make our guides eat all copper mines or mountains that did not come up to expectations. He smiled so superciliously, and was so dignified withal, that we decided to turn back once more under his guidance. So, changing our tatters, and filling our saddle-bags anew, we sent the waggon back to Kuboos, and, guided by the egregious Jacob and with a diminutive little Namaqua as a fourth, we retraced our steps along the river-bank, upstream.

We rested again at the "Kiman Klip" and tried to lure the big snake out by means of dynamite, but without avail. We again negotiated without mishap the various bad places, though my state of blue funk whilst crossing the sand-slide was not lessened by the fact that a big crowd of baboons kept pace with us on the rocks above, hooting, barking, and occasionally sending big stones down at us. But, scratched, torn, ragged, and sunflayed, but otherwise sound, we at length found ourselves back in the Tatas Bergen—where several of our pegs were already standing. Soon we were on our old tracks, as our guide stalked up a well-known ravine, and I could see murder in Ransson's eye as he chewed at his old brier. But one by one we passed the ravines leading to our other pegs, and when at length we had to leave our horses and climb, it was up an entirely new peak, and our hopes ran high.

At length, on a high ridge, Jacob halted and pointed dramatically to an outcrop—and copper it was, and

a good deal of it. But under no stretch of the imagination could it be called a " mountain " of copper—in fact, in no single particular did it answer to the place described by Preuss.

No! we had been fooled again—though this time I felt our cicerone had been innocent of intent to deceive, and therefore could not be shot out of hand—indeed, he had shown us a very nice prospect! So after we had pegged the spot we sat down and gave him some *tabaki*, and I questioned him.

" Now, Jacob," I said, " what sort of a man was this Herr Preuss ? "

" Wit man," he said, promptly.

" Yes, I know he was white, but what was he like ? Tall ? Short ? Fair ? Dark ?—what ? "

" Ja, Herr Kaptein." (He always called me " Kaptein " when I gave him *tabaki*.)

" Was he a big, tall, fair man—like Baas Ransson ? "

" Ja, Herr Kaptein." (Ransson's about 5 feet, and has the complexion of a sunburnt Zulu.)

" Lot of hair—big beard like me, eh ? "

" Ja, Herr Kaptein." (I'm bald—no beard.)

" Sure his name was Preuss ? "

" Ja, Herr Kaptein."

" Wasn't it Smith ? "

" Ja, Herr Kaptein."

" Or Jones—or Brown—or Robinson ? "

" Ja, ja, Herr Kaptein."

" Right," I said ; " this must be the spot. This Court acquits you. Any man who has been guide to the white man you describe has my sincere sympathy."

We spent a few days in the vicinity, finding numerous copper prospects, and eventually decided to try to reach Kuboos through the mountains instead of going back by the Orange to Zendling's Drift. *En route* we hoped to be able to look at the " native " copper we had heard so much about, the road to which was known to both our guides. So we planned to cross to our previous water-hole in the Gauna Gulip River.

When we arrived at this conclusion we were at a

spot some miles from the Orange, up an unnamed dry river that by compass bearings appeared to trend in the direction of the Gauna Gulip, from which low, but rugged and difficult, mountain ridges separated us. So to avoid a detour of at least two days, we decided to follow up this unknown ravine instead of retracing our steps, hoping that it would ultimately converge into the right river-bed, where we should be near water, of which we had very little.

All the long afternoon we toiled up the defile, the winding sand-bed rising until the encompassing rocky walls were only a couple of hundred feet high, but still too steep for horses. At length, just about sunset, we came to the end of the crumbling schist and a granite intrusion rose on either hand—huge rounded boulders the size of cottages piled one upon another and without a vestige of earth or sand in the network of cavities between them. And after a few hundred yards of these we were faced by a low connecting granite *nek*, barring our progress, and abruptly ending the ravine. Over this we were confident of finding the Tatas River, from which we could easily reach our destination. I was riding ahead, and found the *nek* quite easy of ascent and scarce a hundred feet high. Up this I rode, crossed a few yards of ridge and looked down—and nearly fell from the pony in sheer funk!

For I was at the edge of a sheer precipice of 600 or 700 feet in depth, its face of horrible, smooth, slippery-looking granite, with scarce a crack or crevice in it to offer foothold for a cat, and with but a few huge rounded boulders clinging to its face as by a miracle.

It was almost dark, but in the depths below I could see the sand-river we were bound for, and could have almost dropped a stone into it—but to attempt to get down to it—even without the horses—looked sheer madness!

Ransson and the two guides came up, and the latter shook their heads and clucked and said we must go back—and go round—which would mean two days to reach the spot below us! Ransson merely grunted

and, getting off his horse, he rummaged in his saddle-bags and produced a small book.

Now, I had seen this volume before, and its title was *Rambles among the Alps*, by Whymper, the great Alpine and Himalayan climber. This pernicious volume had had a most demoralising effect upon Ransson. I had frequently noticed that whenever we came to a particularly bad place, where there was a choice of climbing or going round, he would climb for preference ; whilst I meandered round the base of the peak, he would carefully pick out the most precipitous part of it, where I would look up at him and see him apparently hanging on by one eyebrow and flourishing that infernal book. He talked of "crevasses" and "couloirs" and "glaciers" and other weird things in his sleep, and once, when I caught him tobogganing down a sand-slope on his only pants, and reproached him, he had said disdainfully, "My dear chap, I'm simply practising 'glissading.'"

So when he now got out that book, and got under a rock and lit a bit of candle and began to peruse it, I knew what to expect.

I said, "Look here, Ransson, I'm going back."

He said, "I'm going down."

I said, "Right! I'll bury you when I get there in three days' time."

"Rot," he said ; "you'll never make a mountaineer. Why, look what Whymper says——"

"Damn Whymper!" I said. "We don't want Whymper, we want Paulham and Santos Dumont, and aeroplanes and a balloon or two, and a thousand yards of rope. I'm going back!"

He said, "You're not. I'm going to take you down—and the horses." . . . And he did.

We tried in either direction for about an hour ; but my way it only got worse, and I could only hold on, and look over and feel giddy. At times Ransson whooped at me from some awful perch, and I bleated back ; then he remembered Whymper again and tried to "yodel." Luckily, about then, little Samuel

shouted to me, and getting back to the horses I found that he had discovered a place where a descent for a man might be practicable, though for horses it looked madness.

Samuel said we must wait for the *nacht zon* (night sun), as he called the moon, and so in the dark we sat and waited for it to rise, whilst the " boys " clucked and muttered and Ransson sucked his empty pipe and took intermittent counsel from Whymper by matchlight, and I funked and worried and wondered why I hadn't the moral courage to take the whole crowd back! At long last came the moon, and we started, Sam in advance, then Ransson and his horse, then Jacob and the pack-mule, whilst I led my horse, and the expedition, strategically from the rear. For two hours we clung and stumbled and slid diagonally across and down that almost perpendicular face, clinging to shrubs, following cracks where we actually had to place the horses' hoofs for them, urging them to scramble over horrible little water-worn places where, once they lost momentum or hesitated, they must have gone to the bottom, and eventually striking a very narrow ledge where there was sand and a firmer footing. I hugged myself, for we surely must be half-way down ; in fact, I had just begun to whistle from sheer relief when Sam—who had gone on ahead—came back.

We must go back, he said ; it was impossible to get through that way ; we must try back above the sand.

Then Ransson went and had a look, and at last I did myself. The sand-gully ended in a fairly level patch flanked by titanic granite boulders, and, creeping between, we again looked down a sheer precipice —in fact, this particular spot overhung the sand about three hundred feet below. We were dog-tired, and I refused flatly to go a step farther in the treacherous moonlight. So we off-saddled and turned in, the last straw being our discovery that the water-bags on the pack-mule were empty, bone dry. The " boys " had been helping themselves ; and that night we thirsted.

In the morning, parched and anxious, we started back and tried another route, and after four hours of nightmare, during which Ransson, who was now ahead, absolutely built a path for the horses over hundreds of feet, we came safely to the bottom.

A couple of hours' hurried trek and we reached Gauna Gulip, passing plenty of springbok on the way and not even troubling to shoot at them—we were too thirsty.

We found the water in the sand-hole practically finished, and the trickle quite insufficient to satisfy us, and had to be content with a kettleful of the horrible stagnant liquid from the open pool, foul, stinking, and full of animalcules. We strained it through a handkerchief and made some coffee, and after a brief rest again trekked up the river-bed, coming at sunset to the base of an abrupt range of fantastic peaks which appeared impassable. Here we found a tiny pool of fairly good water, and as our guides told us the huge nugget of native copper we had come to see lay in the slope above us, we cried a halt and slept there. In the morning, to my dismay, I found that Ransson had fever, and though he climbed up to look at the copper, he was manifestly ill. Close by the tiny pool of water there stood an old deserted hut of dry branches which offered some little shade from the terrific heat, and into this he crawled, having taken the last of our quinine, whilst I took hammer and cold chisel and made my way once more up to the big nugget. It is an enormous mass of absolutely pure copper, 4 or 5 feet in length, with a girth of 7 or 8 feet—and weighing several tons.

I endeavoured to cut off a projecting point with hammer and chisel, the big mass of metal giving forth a most sonorous, bell-like sound at every stroke I struck, and the effect of the loud ringing clang echoing from peak to peak in this wild and desolate spot was startling in the extreme. The mass has been rolled down from the spot, some 40 feet above, where it once formed an outcrop, and here a shaft

of about 8 feet has been sunk, disclosing a thin vein of native copper leading down from it.

This big "nugget," which is by far the largest discovered in South Africa, and is only equalled in size by the huge masses of Lake Superior, belongs to Mr. Giffen, a Port Nolloth prospector.

I found Ransson still asleep, but when he awoke he said that though he felt better he had been light-headed a lot, imagining he'd heard a big church bell ringing all the time! I told him about what I had been doing with the copper, and he seemed much relieved to find that the noise had been real instead of imaginary, and would not hear of resting any longer, though he was obviously unfit to ride.

The guide's idea had been to cross from this spot to the Gold Camp, and thence through Hell's Kloof to Kuboos, where we had sent the waggon; but this was old ground to us, and we wished to try a new route.

At length Jacob said that he had once been through a pass which would make a much shorter journey for us, but it was very difficult on foot, and he doubted if horses could be got through. But after our experience of the day before anything might be possible, and we decided to try it.

As it would be moonlight we did not start till the cool of evening. Our track led across difficult foot-hills of granite débris, broken by innumerable ravines, to where a gap in the mountain barrier marked the entrance to the pass. Long before reaching it we struck a dry river-bed, pleasant with *cameel-doorn*, mimosa, and other greenery, whilst here and there thick beds of reeds showed that moisture was still in the soil. Altogether a very pleasant valley, but gradually the encircling peaks of tilted quartzite narrowed in, and at dusk we entered a gloomy ravine that led us to a narrow point. Through this, and we were in an absolute cañon. On either hand the river cliffs towered up hundreds of feet, in places absolutely overhanging, whilst the narrow stream-bed up which we struggled was a chaos of fallen rocks, débris, and huge boulders.

Through this cramped Krantz the wind, concentrated as though driven through the nozzle of a huge bellows, tore with such force that we could scarcely make headway even where the going was fair. But hour after hour we blundered and stumbled and fought our way through this hideous gorge, in almost Cimmerian darkness, for we had been wrong in depending upon the moon ; her light could scarcely reach us for hours after the open country had been made almost as light as day. Ransson was delirious and talking all sorts of rot, and yelling and singing defiance to the wind, and I was thankful indeed when at length the moon did appear overhead, and light up our difficult path. Then, suddenly, the profound gully ended, and we had to negotiate a slope of quite 45 degrees with scarce foothold for a cat, scrambling up, and up, breathlessly to a great height. A brief rest on a saddle-back ridge, a downward plunge into darkness again, through rocks, thorn, and other impedimenta, and again we were in the gorge. At length we emerged into a deep crater-like valley surrounded by high peaks, where we off-saddled and slept beside a tiny pool of water. Morning showed us most surprising surroundings. We were, in truth, in an actual crater, the huge encircling walls of which were of a new and extremely interesting formation. A huge upheaval had taken place at some remote period, and the riven rocks now reared aloft in abrupt peaks were of alternate layers of quartzite and of a conglomerate of a similar nature to the so-called *banket* of the Rand. Enormous masses of this "pudding stone," fallen from the peaks above, now cumbered the slopes on every side, and the beds of the ravines were full of it. The peaks showed over a thousand feet of alternate beds of this ferruginous conglomerate, and its resemblance to the gold-bearing reef of Johannesburg was so great that we thought we had stumbled on a new El Dorado.

However, our first few eager pannings were disappointing, for they showed no free gold ; but we

had neither tools nor time for a proper test, for our stores were exhausted, Ransson was still full of fever, and the fact that a leopard had taken old Ezaak's dog, quite close to us, as we had lain sleeping the sleep of exhaustion by the pool, and without a fire, warned us that we should have dangerous neighbours if we stayed.

Still, we should certainly return, so with the few samples we could carry at our saddle-bows we climbed by dangerous paths out of this strange abyss, passing over ridge after ridge of the same sort of rock, till late in the afternoon we could see, through a gap in the mountains westward, yet another range whose characteristic shape showed them to be granite, and beyond the spur of them a wide, dim expanse of plain. "Kuboos," said Jacob, pointing to where mountain and plain met, and late that night we rode into a dry river-bed where, close to a beautiful trickle of actually clean water, our waggon was waiting.

Kuboos is really the only "permanent" centre for the Richtersfeldt Hottentots, for here they have a tiny stone-built mission church, round which cluster a variable number of mat *pondhoeks*. Practically the whole of the population called on us the following morning, bringing goat's milk in various weird receptacles, amongst them a number of women and girls of all sizes, all chattering and laughing gaily, in absolute contrast to the taciturnity of the men. Many of the younger women were quite good-looking, though their faces were mostly adorned with the hideous smears of soot and ochre with which they delight to paint themselves. Each woman carried at her waist a small tortoise-shell as a "beauty box," in which was kept these "beautifiers," together with a hare's tail, some sweet-smelling buchu leaves, and other weird toilet essentials.

Kuboos itself is absolutely without interest. The church, huts, etc., stand upon bare foothills of decomposed granite without a sign of vegetation, for the only "lands" the natives cultivate lie high up on the top of the magnificent granite range that

towers above the settlement, the path to them being so steep that the corn is brought down in sleds.

Prominent amongst the soaring peaks of this bold granite barrier is a striking castellated cluster known as "Kuboos Tower," the pillars and buttresses of which might well have been piled aloft by some titanic builder.

These Hottentots of Kuboos are wretchedly poor, for though nominally a tiny commonwealth sharing equally their belongings, the fine herds of cattle and flocks of sheep occasionally met with in the locality do not belong to them, but to old Jasper Cloete, their nominal chief, a fat, wily old chap, who could never be cajoled into embracing Christianity when once he had grasped the fact that to do so he should give up all his goods and chattels to the common weal. He could hardly be blamed! Indolent, shiftless, and hopelessly degenerate, these Richtersfeldt Hottentots, nominally Christians, have all the failings of their savage forefathers, and of the white man whose "faith" they have adopted, without the good qualities of either. They have been taught to chant a few hymns, parrot-fashion, and some of the outward forms of "Christianity" as disseminated by the Berlin Mission; but witchcraft, demonology, and all the beliefs of their ancient and more robust savagery still dominate them when once they are outside their little stone church at Kuboos. Avowedly, they believe in a resurrection—and they are devout enough to forgather from far and wide to partake of *nachtmaal* once a year. Really, they believe that the soul of the newly departed takes possession of a jackal—known to them as the *K'nas Jackhals*, and many a time have I seen the *ouderlings* (elders) of this Christian Mission crouching round a camp fire in abject fear because an unusual-looking jackal had been seen sniffing round the camp, and they imagined one of the party was about to die and that the uncanny animal was prowling round waiting for his soul. A mass of superstition, a race of cadging, whining beggars, the only qualities they ever pos-

sessed—hardihood, courage, endurance—have been emasculated by their newly acquired "religion," and they are the least likeable of any natives I have ever had to suffer.

A few days of interesting prospecting in the vicinity, and I received a mail with instructions to return temporarily to Cape Town; so, paying off the "boys," we sent the waggon direct to Port Nolloth, whilst Ransson and myself, with our horses and a pack-mule in charge of little Samuel, took the circuitous route down to the Orange, near Aries Drift, to look at certain supposed nitrate deposits there, thence striking across open country to the coast near Buchu Bay, from whence we followed the coast down to Port Nolloth.

And those last few days were crammed with more discomfort than all the rest of the trip put together!

For a howling sand-storm battered and choked and half blinded us by the river, and when, our work finished there, we struck across to the coast late at night, we were enveloped in a dense sea-fog that drenched us to the skin. It was intensely cold, too, and when we off-saddled and tried to sleep we were soon half frozen. Then the sam-pans tackled us, and I got up with both eyes swollen so that I could not see out of them, and in a state of intolerable irritation. The sand was very heavy going, and for two days we rode along the coast against a wind that the ponies could hardly stand up against, the sand blowing into us at such a rate that I felt grateful to the sam-pans for bunging my eyes up. Nothing but monotonous scrub and sand the whole way made the ride seem interminable, but at length the wind bore the tolling of a bell to us—the bell-buoy of Port Nolloth—and soon after we rode into that fag-end of creation itself.

We were in rags, and so frayed and blistered by exposure that we were not recognised by people who knew us well in the little dorp.

CHAPTER XI

SECOND TRIP TO RICHTERSFELDT—SMASH-UP IN HELL'S KLOOF—CHRISTMAS AT KUBOOS—TESTING THE "BANKET"—A NEAR THING IN THE RAPIDS—AFTER A LEOPARD—NEW TRAILS—HOTTENTOT SUPERSTITION—STEWED FLAMINGO AND OTHER WEIRD DISHES—END OF THE TRIP.

A MONTH later I was again back in Port Nolloth, accompanied by Ransson and L. Poulley, a Rhodesian to whose imagination the huge beds of conglomerate we had seen appealed very strongly. We came prepared to test them thoroughly, and, if possible, to explore the Tatas Berg and the eastern portion of the district.

The wiseacres of Port Nolloth shook their heads sagely and prophesied all sorts of dangers and difficulties.

"Prospect the Richtersfeldt in December! Madness . . . no water . . . heat like H—— with the lid off," etc. etc.

But, as events proved, our troubles came from neither of these sources, for though the heat really merited the description given it, we were all used to it, and though we suffered a bit from thirst at times, we had rather too much water before the trip was over.

We had difficulty over the transport, for it was harvest-time and the natives were busy getting in their corn, and it was only after several days' delay that we received an urgent message to the effect that our waggon was waiting us at "15 miles" and that there was no water for the oxen. They called them "oxen," but we found a most nondescript team of cows, heifers, oxen, and young bulls had been got together to take us part of the way; still, poor as the team was, it served, and we were thankful for

small mercies. We did not follow our previous route, this time skirting the mountains running almost due north to Lekkersing and Brakfontein, at both of which places there was water. At the latter spot our troubles began. The waggon could take us no farther, and its native owner had arranged for a conveyance from Kuboos to meet us there and take us on. So at a most dreary spot, not far from the pool of brak water that gives the place its name, we were dumped with all our belongings, and the rickety waggon with its scratch team turned back hurriedly to the harvesting. Later, our ponies turned up from Kuboos, and with them, to our dismay, a small cart for our belongings, which had taxed the capacity of the departed waggon. It was obviously not half big enough for the load, but to send for another meant several days' more delay, and so we turned to and packed and loaded and overloaded that cart till it looked a veritable work of art. It was piled aloft like a haystack, and the load projected well over the quarters of the oxen, overlapped the wheels on either side, and stuck out behind like the stern of a ship. And always we found something more to pile —or tie—on, but at length, festooned like a tinker's waggon, we had it securely roped and were ready to start.

The oxen were inspanned, the driver gave a yell and a crack of his whip, and it moved in a swaying, staggering manner across the veldt. Ransson and Poulley mounted and followed hopefully, and even I began to think it might possibly pull through, and was climbing into my saddle when I heard a shout, and turned to see the axle buckle as though made of lead, the wheels spread till they could spread no farther, and the whole caboodle collapse—crushed flat by its load. . . . There was nothing to be done, and all we said didn't seem to help ! It was hopeless to attempt to mend it, and so we mounted a "boy" on the fastest horse, gave him food and water, and sent him off at a gallop to bring another vehicle from Kuboos.

Meanwhile we pitched our tent and made ourselves comfortable, and waited four long days. There was literally nothing to do, no game to be found except a few Namaquas partridges and a solitary hare, which it seemed a shame to shoot.

At the pool known as " Brakfontein " there were traces of an ancient settlement, with many of the circular graves made by the Hottentots before they became Christianised, and in the sandstone cliffs were many small caves which showed signs of having been inhabited; but I searched in vain for any trace of Bushman paintings. These sandstones resembled those of the Zwartmodder series; in places they are interbedded with shales and quartzite, showing many signs of earth movement and lateral pressure.

On the morning of the fifth day a light waggon arrived and we lost no time in trekking. Three days later we were at Kuboos, where we stored our heavy gear with the native teacher, and began making arrangements for our next move. Whilst delayed at Port Nolloth we had gathered much more information as to the old discovery of gold in " Dabee River," at which we had worked successfully on our previous trip, and had arrived at the conclusion that we had been taken to the wrong spot. Our informants told us that at the right place nuggets could be picked up in abundance, and it was obvious that they thought little of us for not coming back with a load of gold!

More, there was forthcoming an intelligent coloured man who had accompanied the first expedition, and seen and helped pick up the first nuggets, and who for a substantial consideration would come with us and show us the real spot.

And as we did not like the idea that possibly an El Dorado was all the time waiting near where we had tried in vain, we decided to let this chap take us there, and altered our plans accordingly.

We had no intention, however, of taking a waggon through Hell's Kloof again, and tried to obtain a Scotch cart, but in vain. There were several waggons at Kuboos, but the only cart available was the one

we had placed *hors de combat.* However, it had been dragged in behind the waggon, and a close examination showed that, although the axle had buckled to a V-shape, the wheels and body were fairly sound, and Poulley said we could mend it ourselves. There was plenty of wood in the river-bed, and, turning to, we soon had a big fire, and the axle was heated red-hot and hammered straight, and the cart ready to start again before the group of open-mouthed Hottentots watching us knew what we were doing.

With a light load drawn by six oxen, our horses, and a few "boys," we started the following morning down the long dry Annis River towards Hell's Kloof. To the right rose the formidable range through which we must eventually find a way, on our left, towards the sea, the rolling plain, covered with dark scrub, stretched as far as the eye could reach, dreary, solitary, uninhabited.

Far ahead, through the already shimmering heat, lay the dark winding belt of trees bordering the Orange, and faint against the glaring sky showed the high, fantastic peaks in German territory.

We were accompanied by two of the Namaqualand District Police, whose unenviable task it was to search for the body of a Hottentot supposed to be dead of thirst somewhere in the mountains beyond Hell's Kloof. He had been missing for some time, and a relative—a guide who knew the mountains well—had found his spoor in the Dabee River—close to where we were returning to try for gold. They are wonderful trackers, these Hottentots, and this guide could tell that the missing man had been staggering and in an exhausted condition when he had left our old water-hole—which was long since dry—and as he (the guide) knew of no water for a full day's trek in any direction, he concluded the man was dead.

Neither of the police had been through Hell's Kloof before, and they did not care how soon their unpleasant task was over. A long day's ride brought us to near the Numees mine, and early the following

day we started through Hell's Kloof. The six sturdy oxen were either of them individually capable of dragging the light cart and its contents over the greater part of the track—bad as it was—but unfortunately they were not used to being yoked to anything smaller than a waggon with a span of about sixteen beasts, and the task of driving them was an extremely difficult one, as often they were pulling in different directions. But we successfully negotiated bad spot after bad spot, and had arrived within sight of the formidable ascent out of the Kloof which had hung us up before, when, on going down a short but very steep slope, the leaders jibbed and stopped, the wheelers kept on and ran into them, and the cart took charge. It side-skidded a yard or two, and then went down with a run. Smash went the disselboom, into a steep face of rock went the cart, and bags, boxes, tools, dynamite, bottles of acid, pestles and mortars went flying in all directions. The detonators were in my pocket, but still the little hair I have remaining rose as I saw the case of dynamite describe the arc of a circle in the air a few feet from me, and come down with a bang on a rock, splitting it open and scattering the cartridges in all directions. A large glass jar containing "aqua regia" (a potent mixture of hydrochloric and nitric acids) also came down on the stones, and, remarkably enough, although the stopper was broken sheer off, the jar was otherwise uninjured. And among the débris of our belongings the six oxen plunged and cavorted, and by the time we had cut them clear everything was stamped flat. . . . But the cart! It was a mass of splinters, the disselboom in fragments, and the whole of the forepart wrecked, the ironwork twisted and broken, and practically nothing intact but the wheels. At first sight it appeared impossible to ever make a cart of it again, even if we had a whole waggon-builder's staff and tools at our disposal; as for doing it in Hell's Kloof, the idea was preposterous.

So we called philosophy to our aid, and sat down and had some grub by the ruins, our police friends

bidding us good-bye and riding on ahead to look for the dead man. And looking at the melancholy wreckage, we got vicious—that blessed cart had let us down badly at Brakfontein, and again it had chosen a remote spot to turn and rend us! And Poulley, after some unpublishable remarks, said, " I'm not going to be beat by that blamed one-horse shay. I'm going to mend it, or bust! "

Ransson filled his pipe and grunted and waded in to put the pieces together, and seeing that they would not be disheartened, I got my pony and rode back to the old deserted mine at Numees, where I had noticed several old crowbars lying about at the mouth of the adit. They were about 5 feet long, and heavy and strong, and might serve to lash together the splintered disselboom, for there was not a stick of straight wood big enough to cut a new one within days of us. And by dint of lashing, screwing, nailing, and patching for hours, we at length got the ruins to look something like a cart again, and could chance trekking. The oxen rested all these hours, and as the moon would be high and bright we decided to trek all night, and being utterly reckless now, we did the rest of the journey at top speed. We took risk after risk, but our luck held, and also the lashings, and towards morning we found ourselves again in the sands of Dabee River. We were dog-tired, but full of curiosity as to where our new guide would take us. Would it be under the big white reef in the ravine to the left, where I had always wished to try, or in the gully a mile eastward, where Ransson had always believed it to be?

On we went by the light of the now sinking moon, over the white sand, where the waggon spoor of our last trip lay distinct and fresh, between the dark and solemn mountains, passing unexplored and mysterious ravines we had never penetrated, on and on over the old spoor, till at last our guide, who was leading, held up his hand for us to stop.

It was the spot—the same spot we had worked at before, after all! . . .

We were too tired even to swear, but flung off our saddles and slept like logs, where we fell.

When we woke we found that Poulley's head was within a foot of a tiny bush in which lay coiled the biggest puff-adder I have ever seen, so big indeed, and so strangely marked, that I believe it to have been a new variety.

Our guide smiled superiorly when we showed him the work we had done on our previous visit, and said he would find us nuggets in less than no time! So we gave him all the "boys" and told him to go to work and find them; but though we ourselves again searched, washed, and prospected most thoroughly for several days, neither he nor we could find the slightest trace of gold! The day after our arrival, the two police with their guide passed our camp on their way back, having failed to find the body they were searching for. They were surprised to see us, as they had believed it impossible to mend the cart and bring it over such a track. They were glad to replenish their water-bottles, for they had found no water and had anticipated a thirsty ride back. The body of the unfortunate Hottentot was eventually found within half a mile of where we were camped, and the fact that he died of thirst brought home to us very vividly the dangers of these terrible mountains. Once lost in them without water, and death is almost certain . . . yet water exists here and there, and, terribly enough, this poor native was within half an hour of plenty of it when he died of thirst—had he only known the spot.

We had been very short of water on our previous visit here, and as the summer was now in full swing and most of the water-holes dry, we had been anxious on this point, but our guide to the gold (?) had also assured us that he knew of a fine fountain of water near the spot—and in this respect he was right. For after the first day's failure in gold-seeking we thought we had better make sure of the far more important question of water, and asked him to take us to it. Riding up one of the tortuous ravines, he led us

higher and higher up the mountains, and I confess that I became more sceptical at every yard. But at length he brought us to a most curious and beautiful spot. The gully leading to it gradually narrowed and became more thickly bushed, and we were now near the mountain-top. Suddenly, after an abrupt turn, the ravine widened out into a brilliant patch of luscious green grass surrounded by tall mimosa-thorns full of fragrant yellow blossom, and hemmed in by almost vertical rocks. At the far end some disruption of nature had thrown a huge bed of conglomerate across the gap ; this mass was partly overhanging, and from its under-part dripped beautiful clear water, into a long dark pool below.

The whole of the rock face was a mass of beautiful maidenhair ferns, from the fronds of which dripped the water, ice-cool and as clear as crystals. The spot would be wonderful and beautiful even in a well-watered country ; but here, amongst scorching sands and blistering mountains, where men died of thirst, it seemed little short of miraculous. So well hidden is it that, unless shown the spot, one might pass within a few yards of it and never dream that water was near. Except our guide, none of the other natives knew of the place. He called it *Ki-Ka-Kam* —" Great Water " in Bushman.

A week of hard work having proved without a doubt that there were no more nuggets left in Dabee River, we put some more lashings on the cart, shod our horses—which had been footsore from the blistering heat of rock and sand—and started back towards Kuboos a few days before Christmas.

The heat was very great, and as we had doubts as to the cart's safe passage back through Hell's Kloof, Ransson and I divided the dynamite, each carrying about ten pounds on our saddles.

By noonday the sun beat down with such power that it was impossible to bear one's hand on the rifle-barrel ; and as the bag of dynamite hanging at the saddle banged and flopped about in a very alarming manner, I could not help remembering the instructions

on each cartridge—" Not to be exposed to the rays of a tropical sun."

Ransson and Poulley were miles ahead, and once or twice, as the bag seemed to smoke, I felt inclined to untie it and " forget " to bring it along, but I knew Ransson wouldn't do so, and so I decided to wait and see if he blew up first. By the time we got into Hell's Kloof the air was simply sizzling, and I rode with shut eyes, trying to keep myself cool by thinking of the snow in England at Christmas, and wishing I were sitting deep in it instead of in a red-hot saddle there in Namaqualand. Just then there came a terrific bang from ahead of me.

" Great Scott ! " I thought, as my old nag shied and nearly bucked me off, " that's poor old Ransson gone—and he's got my pipe."

My rifle-butt hit the dynamite an awful whack as the pony pawed round trying to get rid of me ; and altogether I was by no means dull for a minute or two. Then Poulley came running up the path towards me.

" Ransson ? " I gasped. " Has he bust ? "

" Bust be hanged ! " he snorted. " Wish he had ! Fired at a buck, a fine, fat, juicy klipbok, and missed it clean, at twenty yards ! It's gone up this gully. Get off, you fathead, and come on ! We must get him for our Christmas dinner ! "

Behold me, then, forgetting snow, forgetting heat, forgetting both dynamite and Fahrenheit—for we did want buck-meat badly—and leaving the old nag to wander at will and get itself blown to smithereens if need be, I climbed down and chased after Poulley, already panting his perspiring way up the steep side-gully. What idiots we were, to be sure—that buck simply laughed at us ! We must have chased him for fully two hours, but at length we had to give him best. No roast buck for that Christmas, and, sadder and thirstier men, we had to scramble our way back into the alleged path where we had left our horses. When we got down into the oven-like gully again Ransson stood holding the two nags and

smoking ruminatingly. " It hasn't gone off yet," he said—which was pretty obvious.

We got through the kloof at length and off-saddled, gingerly removing the dynamite to some distance, and covering it with *melkbosch*, for the only shade within about twenty miles at that time was given by a solitary *Aloe dichotoma* that stands at the entrance to the pass, and under whose square yard of shadow we all three had to squat.

The heat was so great that the oxen, when outspanned, made no effort to move, but simply stood in their tracks, lifting one foot after another from the burning sand.

We arrived at Kuboos on Christmas Eve, and decided to at least rest on Christmas Day before starting again.

We wanted meat badly, but the natives would not kill a sheep on Christmas Eve, and it began to look like a Christmas dinner of sardines and bully beef.

But Christmas morning brought us luck, for the granite rocks were covered with pigeons, and the twenty-odd that Poulley shot saved the situation. Of them, with a scrap of bacon and some tinned peas, we made a gorgeous stew : we had raisins and currants in the waggon, saved for this very occasion, and made a very creditable pudding in a prospecting-pan ; we baked fresh *roster-kook* and later we feasted right royally.

We had even a tot of brandy each from our " medical stores," and as we had what is much more precious in Namaqualand—plenty of good water—and a shady tree to lie under, we had a splendid time, and altogether spent a far saner Christmas than we should have done in civilisation. The dissipation of Christmas over, we started for the conglomerates. To reach there a cart was out of the question ; indeed, we were not at all sure that horses would be able to get through with anything like a pack. So we travelled light, walking most of the way, and striking south-east into the valley between the T'Houms Mountains. Huge granite boulders the size of



LAUNCH OF THE "OUTRIGGER."



"OUTRIGGER" ON WHICH WE CROSSED TO THE GERMAN POST AT ZENDLING'S DRIFT.

suburban villas choked the valley as we penetrated farther, making progress extremely difficult and tedious, and nightfall found us still struggling in this unnamed ravine.

Only well on to midday the next day did we leave it to clamber up a mountain slope as steep as a roof. Then came half a day of incessant effort, without a vestige of a path, to heights where a vast panorama of peaks lay spread beneath us, all of them nameless, untrodden, unknown. At length a game path was struck which led us to a lovely little pool of water surrounded by thick grass, and it would be hard to say which of the two our ponies enjoyed the more. Late in the day, and after severe clambering, we reached a peak and looked down into a basin below, completely surrounded by almost precipitous walls of conglomerate. It was our "plum," the place we believed would make our fortunes; and plunging down the precipitous slope at imminent risk of breaking our necks, we found ourselves at the tiny pool of water known as "Quagga," where we intended making our camp. There was a sufficiency of water, though it was getting black and smelt bad, and by it we rigged up a few bushes as a bivouac—for we brought no tent.

Our hopes were high, for, as I have before mentioned superficially, the conglomerates were identical with the Rand *banket*; but again we were doomed to disappointment, many days of most laborious work, crushing and panning bed after bed, utterly failing to find even a "colour."

At length a nugget the size of a pin's head rewarded us, and we decided that Ransson should remain at the spot and further test its possibilities, whilst Poulley and I would take a rapid trip round our former peggings.

As our stores were principally at Kuboos, from whence we occasionally got a mule-load over the extremely difficult mountain path, we travelled on the scantiest of rations, each man carrying a little tea, sugar, coffee, and meal on his saddle, and depending

on our guns for anything more substantial. The difficult ravine which we had previously traversed by moonlight was safely negotiated, though daylight showed us that it was every whit as formidable as we had imagined. We passed the night at the tiny pool of water below the big copper nugget, and as we had seen no sign of game, our supper was not a heavy one. Next day we were off well before sun-up, anxious to shoot something for the pot, but it was not till late in the afternoon that Poulley spotted a *klomp* of springbok on the sandy, kopje-studded plains over which we were now travelling. The wavering mirage made shooting difficult, but at length he bagged one, and we slung it over the saddle and hurried on, for we were belated, and wished to reach the Orange before dark. We cut into a sand-river that looked like bringing us out by the Tatas Berg, but it turned out to be more than usually tortuous, and it was late at night when we reached the welcome river. Too tired to eat, we did not take the precaution to clean the buck, with the result that, getting up ravenous the next morning, and longing for a good buck steak, we found our hard-earned quarry green, putrid, and quite uneatable. Even Sam, the "boy" with us, could not face it, and as we were extremely sharp-set, and longing for something other than heavy *roster-kook*, I suggested dynamiting a pool for fish.

So we stripped, and I threw a charge with a short fuse and detonator into a deep-looking pool near by. As usual, however, there was little to show for such a splash—nothing, in fact, but half a dozen springers, the size of herrings.

I was busily swimming about, catching these and throwing them to Poulley on the bank. Suddenly he crouched down.

"Hush!" he said. "Bob your head under, or pretend to be a rock or something—there's a wild goose!" And he hopped off to the trees where the guns lay, doing good time, considering he was Adam-naked and the ground was covered in thorns.

Meanwhile I tried to look as much like a rock as

possible, for wild geese are the most wary of birds, and I floated round with little but my nose above the water, mentally cooking that goose, and eating him without sage and onions. Then Poulley came creeping back with the gun, and started out on a spit of rock towards the rapids. Then I heard the goose "get up and get," and saw it going down beyond a small island the wrong side of the rapids—within easy range, if we could only get to the island.

Poulley beckoned me and said, "You swim better'n I do—wade across and get it." And, like an ass, I thought I could. The rapids looked little more than fifty yards of waist-deep water, though lower down the whole width of the river was a mass of broken foam, and I thought that, with a long pole to steady me, I could get over easily. So I got a stick and my hat, and started. I put the pole in, and one leg up to the knee, and immediately found the current much stronger than I expected; a second step, and I was thigh-deep on a slippery rock, and trying to lean upstream to counteract the force of the water; a third—and I was engulfed in a whirling torrent, and well on my way to the Atlantic. I kept the gun above water instinctively, and spinning like a top, my head also came above water, giving me a glimpse of Poulley staring open-mouthed at me from the bank, which was already well behind, whilst the water dragged and buffeted me, striking me against rock after rock. I was handicapped by the gun, which I did not wish to lose; but realising that in a few more seconds I should be in the main rapids, and that it was better to lose the gun than my life, I was just about to let it go, when I brought up violently against a rock well out of water and was able to grab a projecting point. I hung on and got the gun out, and eventually dragged myself out of the swift current on to the rock, whence I was able to make my way to a point near enough the bank for Poulley to throw me a rope and help me out again.

I was cut, scratched, and bruised very badly, but thankful to be alive at all, for had I been swept but a

few inches farther from the rock, I must have lost my life ; as it was I lost my hat—no light loss in the middle of summer in Namaqualand. It taught me a lesson—never to attempt wading even the most innocent-looking rapid in the Orange.

Meanwhile we also lost the goose, and for the next few days our rations were extremely scanty, an occasional dassie or small turtle-dove—as tough as leather—being all we were able to shoot.

A week spent in the grand gorges and on the precipitous peaks of the little-known Tatas Berg found us an abundance of copper indications, but never a buck, and we started our return journey to Zendling's Drift, by this time almost rationless, our coffee and sugar gone, our tobacco likewise, and a few handfuls of meal and a little tea our only stand-by. And still the game fought shy of us. There were numerous small birds in every tree, brilliant of plumage and of infinite variety, but absolutely nothing to warrant a charge of "No. 6." Occasionally a majestic fish-eagle would sail away from the top of a dead tree to a similar perch across the river, and dozens of grey monkeys chattered at us from the topmost branches of *cameel-doorn* and willow ; here and there a huge leguaan (that monster of lizards, 6 or 7 feet in length), belonging to the monitor species, would plunge from the bank into the water, and baboons hooted at us the live-long day from the rocks above ; but none of these appealed to us—as food.

One incandescent day, when we had bathed and were lolling for a midday spell on a patch of emerald sward near ! ! Ariep ! !, we were lucky enough to witness a scene I am never likely to forget, and would not have missed for anything. Here the river is particularly beautiful ; there are numerous small islands, covered with dense thickets of reeds, that are a favourite feeding-place for the few hippo still left in the Orange. Some of them are well wooded with high willows of a particularly vivid green, and on the overhanging branch of one of these I saw a

baboon appear, clamber out to the extremity, stand up at full height, and dive into the deep pool beneath just as a man would do. He was followed by another and another, until there were at least a score of them climbing, diving, swimming to the bank, and up the tree again, in an endless chain, splashing each other, and enjoying themselves exactly like a crowd of schoolboys.

On the third day the sky became overcast, but we had been so long without seeing rain that we disregarded the signs of its coming. Late that evening we arrived at our old camp beneath the willows, opposite the "Ki-man" rock, the long stretch of still water a pool of liquid fire from the reflection of a most lurid and threatening sunset.

The finely powdered silt made a soft bed, and I slept well, but I awoke to find the rain coming down in sheets, and everything we had soaking wet. The willows were useless as shelter, and the silt soon became a peculiarly slimy and tenacious mud. Daylight came and still it poured; our saddles were like wet brown paper, and we decided to wait where we were till the weather changed. To pass the time, we again exploded a big charge of dynamite as near to the "Ki-man" rock as we could throw it, but no "Groot Slang" appeared. Utterly bored, and already longing for the sun we had grumbled at for months, we sent the "boy" for the horses, resolving to trek, rain or no rain, when suddenly a big troop of baboons appeared on the top of a precipitous kopje above us, and commenced turning the stones over for the scorpions on which they often feed. Almost immediately came a terrific outburst of grunts, barks, yells, and screams, and we saw them flying in all directions, leaving one of the younger ones in the clutch of a fine big leopard. It shook its prey for a moment like a cat shakes a rat, and with a bound disappeared behind a rock near the summit of the peak.

Poulley grabbed the gun. "I'm going up to get him," he said, jamming in the cartridges.

"He's more likely to get you," I warned him, but he was too wet and wild to take any notice of me, and of course I could not let him go alone. So in the pouring rain we two abject idiots started climbing up an almost vertical precipice, the rocks slippery and treacherous with the wet, and giving the most precarious foothold in the best of places. Poulley was ahead with the combination gun; I followed with my heavy Webley revolver. How we got up I hardly know; every time my leader dislodged a stone it had to come my way, and once or twice big ones weighing a hundredweight missed me by inches. I would have given a good deal to turn back, but on he kept till he reached the spot where the leopard had taken his prey. What would have happened had it still been there I am at a loss to say, for we could not have used our weapons without imminent risk of shooting each other, to say nothing of falling several hundred feet. Luckily, however, he had gone, and I, at any rate, was profoundly thankful.

So we came down and saddled up and started again, and all that miserable day it rained, and all that night and all the next day, making the difficulties of the track double, for the rocks were so slippery with the slimy silt that it was almost impossible to stand on them, and the horses floundered as though shod with roller-skates. We had nothing to eat but mealie pap, for our meal was too sodden to make the more comforting *roster-kook*, even when we succeeded in making a fire. On the morning when we arrived in sight of Zendling's Drift there was a gleam or two of sunshine, but the banking-up of enormous thunderclouds showed that we were in for something worse than we had had, and we hurried on to try, if possible, to get where the trees were thick and we might rig up some kind of shelter.

I was ahead with the gun to try and get something for the pot, and was within a mile of the drift when the first big drops began to fall. Then came a flash of lightning, and, though I galloped, by the time I got to the drift I was in the midst of the most terrific

thunderstorm I have ever experienced. The rain fell in sheets and the crash of the thunder was continuous, whilst all around the forked lightning stabbed and flickered and lit the murk with an incessant play of flame. The trees were worse than useless, and the water ran in at my shirt-collar and out of my boots, as for two hours I stood by my frightened horse and waited for the storm to abate, and hoped that we should not get struck—but doubted !

Then Poulley came up half drowned, and with the "boy" in a state of the most abject terror. As soon as they reached me he threw himself on the ground and hid his face, cringing and muttering at every peal and flinching at every flash. Below, the river was rising fast, and between the peals of thunder the rush of the rapids could be heard joining with the howling of the wind and the swish of the rain in a monstrous symphony.

At length there was a slight abatement, the clouds lifted somewhat and we could see Jackal's Berg, a mile or so away, and the play of the lightning on the enormous iron reef that forms its "backbone" was a sight never to be forgotten. The lull was but temporary, and again the storm burst upon us with awful force, and it was nearly sunset when the heavy batteries moved slowly away towards the distant mountains, leaving us like drowned rats, but unhurt.

Our mealie meal was a mass of sodden pap, our little remaining tea spoiled, and our sole ration a solitary tin of sardines, not much amongst three hungry men. Our matches, too, were sodden, and but for the "boy's" flint and steel we should have been in a bad plight ; but he soon recovered from his scare and made us a roaring fire, for wood was plentiful.

With the lifting of the clouds we at once saw that since my last visit the Germans had built quite an imposing-looking station, with a good many rooms in it, over which the German flag was trying to fly in spite of its drenched condition. We slept as near the huge fire as possible, but in the night it rained

again, and our discomfort was added to by the fact that we were still hungry and had little hope of food for the morrow.

In the morning we found a few miserable Hottentots crouching in wet *pondhoeks* near the drift, and tried to buy a goat from them, but they would not sell; and we were just debating whether we should not take one by force when a flock of pigeons saved the situation—and the goat. Then a brace of "pheasants" (the lesser bustard) came Poulley's way, and we were in clover.

Here Poulley left me to ride to Port Nolloth and Cape Town, whilst I returned alone over the mountain to Ransson. He had been unable to locate a single speck of gold further than the one we had found before leaving, and we reluctantly decided to abandon the conglomerate—though I am still of the opinion that some of the innumerable beds or reefs there will eventually be found to be auriferous.

The water at "Quagga" was by this time almost putrid, and as some Hottentots had now appeared on the scene with a large flock of sheep and some cattle which fouled and further diminished the supply every day, we spent several days in exploring the many deep ravines and kloofs in the hope of finding other water-holes. One day, whilst thus engaged, Ransson had an adventure which might have proved very serious. He had descended a deep and narrow defile leading down from an old water-course in the mountains. As he got deeper the gorge narrowed until it became a veritable cañon, gloomy, dark, and profound. The walls were in places barely 6 feet apart, and towered up on either hand perpendicularly for many hundreds of feet, and the whole of this deep rent or crack in the earth—for it was little more—was worn ice-smooth by the action of water. It was towards evening, and only a little light filtered into the place. Here and there came a straight drop of 8 or 10 feet, and it was after negotiating several of these that Ransson, peering down, caught sight of the tops of some rushes in a wider space

below, and knew he was near water. He swung himself down another abrupt narrow place, and suddenly became aware of a strong bestial smell. He cocked his rifle, and peered into the gloom, and his eyes, gradually becoming accustomed to it, showed him that he was in the midst of a big troop of huge baboons. They were absolutely motionless, watching him ; they were on every hand, on every projection of rock, above him, below him, before him, and behind him, for he had passed some of them without seeing them, and so near were several that he could have touched them with his rifle. And there they sat, as still as statues, and glared at him ; and Ransson said that it was one of his most uncanny experiences to see all those pairs of eyes glowering on him in the gloom. To shoot would probably have meant being torn limb from limb ; to turn his back on them and climb the slippery rock would have left him at their mercy ; to go on was impossible, as there was a sheer drop of 20 feet into the water. In this dilemma he did quite mechanically what he could not have bettered by hours of thinking, for he pulled out his matches and lit his pipe. And as the little flame flickered up one of the big baboons—they are huge fellows in these mountains—gave a hoarse, grunting call, and away the whole troop fled, actually brushing against Ransson as they did so, clambering up the almost vertical rocks, and disappearing almost instantly.

I went to the spot the following day, taking a rope with me and a "boy," whilst Ransson tried to reach the other end of the gorge by a circuitous route. Making fast the rope, I easily got down to the rushes, and found an abundance of water in this hollow place, which was circular and wider than the ravine, and the walls of which overhung.

At the far extremity the ravine continued downward in a cleft of about 8 feet wide, and I burst through the reeds and looked down. Below was another basin, nearly full of black water ; it looked very deep, and its overhanging sides were so smooth

that had a man fallen in he could never have got out. Altogether it was a gruesome-looking spot, for the sun at noonday only sent a few flickering rays into the ravine above, and never reached the black, dead water. Beyond the smooth lip of this big basin the ravine fell sheer for two or three hundred feet, and further progress was out of the question.

A day's ride due east from Quagga, in country quite unknown to any of our "boys," we located another fine water-hole. We wished to attempt to reach the Orange in that direction, but the "boys" said we should never get through the mountains. There was the usual tale of no water, though one of them said his father had told him of a spot in that direction where there was a big *fontein*, but no one had been there for years, and that it was *verloren* (lost). It was useless taking the "boys," so Ransson and I set out with our ponies and two days' water, to attempt to find a way through.

Late in the afternoon we climbed the last rise that hid our view to the east, and saw below us a long valley widening in the distance and flanked by abrupt and lofty peaks. The range to the left was continuous and almost vertical, leading to the serried peaks directly ahead that hid the Orange. We got down a breakneck slope into this valley, and found the usual sand-river that made fairly easy going. As usual there was no vestige of a trail, the whole land being apparently devoid even of animal life, silent, deserted, melancholy. We followed the sand-river till nightfall, and slept on its clean soft bed; and we hoped by following it patiently we should surely come to the Orange, but just after our start in the morning it branched in several directions. Whilst uncertain which to follow, we came upon the spoor of a naked foot, old, but showing up clear and fresh in the sand, and so unusual a find, in this deserted country, that we gazed upon it with something like the feelings of Robinson Crusoe on a like occasion. As in all probability it would lead us to the river or to other water, we decided to follow it.

It led us on for hours, up branch-ravines we should never have thought of entering, and at length into a narrow gap in the abrupt wall of mountains. At the mouth of this gap we found the " Lost Water " that Klaas had heard of, a beautiful little pool of clear spring-water surrounded by reeds and a tree or two, an ideal little oasis in the desert. But, with the exception of the solitary and obviously old spoor that led us to it, there was no sign that the place had been visited for many years. The only indication that man had ever been there before were a few bleached and gnawed human bones under the biggest tree—possibly those of him who had made the spoor!

The valley was full of good grass, there was sufficient water for a good herd of cattle, but the whole land lay deserted. Probably the fact that the valley is hemmed in by mountains on all sides keeps the Hottentots from visiting it, and there are many such spots in this little-known region. Having found the water, we pushed on for the Orange, though as we approached the mountains that hemmed it in I began to despair of ever getting through, so rugged and precipitous were they. Our only hope was to follow the principal dry river-bed, though these often end in a *cul-de-sac*. But our luck held, and after interminable twisting and turning in what was surely the most tortuous ravine of all this labyrinth, getting gradually into the heart of the mountains, and being confronted, time after time, with a seemingly impassable barrier, we suddenly found the narrow passage blocked by a bank of dry silt 15 or more feet in height. Over this a sheer precipice faced us, seemingly but a few yards distant, and it appeared that the Orange must be beyond it, and that we must seek another path. But, scrambling up the silt, we saw dense trees immediately below us and heard the song of birds again, and within a few yards had burst through the undergrowth and were on the bank of the river. The precipice was on the farther side, in German territory, a sheer mountain face rising abruptly from the water, which at this spot was scarce a hundred yards

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from bank to bank. The narrow belt of vegetation on either bank had scarce clinging room, and above rose the wall of mountains. Much of the rock was crystalline limestone, beautiful marble, white and pink, whole mountains of it. The narrow belt of trees was extremely hard to break through, though old blaze marks on certain big trees showed we were not the first to visit the spot, as we well might have been. There were leopard spoors everywhere, and whole troops of baboons on the rocks above. We made our horses fast on a patch of grass and worked our way along the bank for a mile or so, but as far as we could see no other outlet pierced the cliffs on our side of the river, and upstream our way was soon blocked by a place where vegetation ended and the vertical cliff overhung the black water. The spot, though beautiful, had something awe-inspiring about it : the sight of this big body of water, silent, lonely, and mysterious, flowing from unknown reaches, pent in between these gigantic walls, and so hidden in this land of thirst through which it flows that the wayfarer might well die of thirst within a few hundred yards of it, appealed strongly to the imagination of men who, like ourselves, had the fear of thirst and the anxiety of constantly searching for water always before them.

We swam over to the German bank, where a bare 10 feet of soil clung to the base of the cliff. High up on the latter the marks of ancient floods showed that a rise of fully 40 feet above the present level had more than once occurred ; and, remembering that heavy rainfall up-country might at any time bring a repetition, we resolved to get out into the open again as soon as possible. So we stayed but the one night, in the middle of which Ransson's horse was cruelly mauled by a leopard, which meant that we had to walk most of the way back to "Quagga," where we found the "boys" just organising a search-party to look for us. A jackal had haunted the camp every night we had been away, and they had no doubt whatever that it was the *K'nas*, or spirit

jackal, and that one of the party was doomed. To their horror Ransson said that for his part he believed the jackal was the doomed party, and, sure enough, that evening he shot the poor animal. Unfortunately, he did not bring it into camp, but left it lying about a hundred yards away, where he shot it, and in the morning it was gone. Probably a hyena had taken it, for both the *stronte wolf* and the *tijger wolf* are common in these mountains ; but we could see no spoor, and of course this circumstance was a triumphal vindication of our " boys' " belief in the supernatural character of the visitor. They clucked and jabbered more than ever they had done, and were obviously scared out of their wits and likely to desert.

Old Klaas told us that in addition to the " Ghost Jackal," these hills were the haunt of a big snake with the head of a goat, which devoured men. Many men had seen this snake, men he had known had been taken by it, and every Richtersfeldt Hottentot believed in it. According to Klaas, it had a playful little peculiarity of being able to emit a blast of air so strong that it would knock down a man whilst still many yards distant from it. It is in no way to be confounded with the *Ki-man* of the " Groot Rivier," which, as I have described, we had already sought the acquaintance of unsuccessfully. I asked Klaas if any trace of this goat-headed monstrosity had been seen around our camp, and he said, " No," but they had heard it repeatedly for the last two days.

" Hark ! " he said, a moment later ; " there it is," and the other " boys " stood in strained, listening attitudes, with fear written upon their faces. We listened too . . . all we could hear being the deep cooing of the large speckled-breasted rock-pigeon. At least so it seemed to us. But Klaas would have none of our laughter ; he said, in effect, that we were deaf as all white men were, and could not tell one sound from another ; and truly deaf we were in contrast to these Hottentots, whose sight and hearing were marvellously acute. Anyhow, we got our guns

and tried to locate the sound, but could not ; not a "boy" would follow us and we saw no pigeons, and the sound was so baffling that, though it never seemed far away, we had to give up without discovering what really made it. It is quite conceivable that very large rock-pythons still exist in these mountains, but we saw none, though some of the puff-adders were so huge as to almost point to their belonging to another species to the ordinary "puff."

These and a large number of the small horned adder (Cerastus) and an occasional cobra were the only snakes, and all of these were greatly feared by our "boys." They all carried an antidote to snake-bite in the shape of a few dried chips, twigs, and bark of a small shrub they call *gif houd* (poison-wood). On being bitten by snake or stung by spider or scorpion, they chew some of this, immediately applying some of the pulp to the wound, and swallowing the remainder. Peculiarly enough, they dread in particular the small sand-gecko, which is so numerous that at sunset its cricket-like chirrup is heard everywhere, and which all scientists assert to be harmless. But the Hottentots believe it to be deadly, and quote numerous cases of men being found dead with a sand-gecko in their clothes or blankets.

But to return to our gold-seeking, which we did day after day, whilst the water dwindled, as did our hopes. Not another speck of gold did we find, nor did any test that my small field laboratory allowed me to carry out give me any encouragement. The likeness to Rand *banket* was remarkable, the important difference being that the gold was wanting. And convinced of this at last, and with an additional reason in the fact that we had lived for days on klipbok flesh alone, without bread, and short rations of nearly putrid water, we despondently packed up our gear and returned over the mountais to Kuboos.

Here I got letters, including certain instructions which sent me bucketing off again to Zendling's Drift, accompanied only by Klaas, whilst Ransson and his henchman proceeded to a spot about twenty

miles lower downstream. My work at Zendling's concluded, I tried to rejoin him by following the river-bank ; but after two days of cutting and hewing through densely tangled thorn scrub and fallen trees, I found that, with a horse at any rate, it was impossible to make a way through, and had reluctantly to make a long detour through the mountains. I was absolutely out of stores, and the last two days Klaas and I lived on a tin of jam and a small tin of rancid sardines, without bread or any substitute for it. And I was therefore glad to find Ransson with a steaming three-legged pot full of flamingo. He shot these each day with a rifle as they strutted on a sand-spit on the German side, for his stores were finished too, and we had no chance of replenishing. And there was still a good deal to be done. But good as the flamingoes tasted, they soon got shy and we were often extremely hard put to it, for there was no game near this spot. And so I came to actually enjoy dassie, and to forbear to turn my nose up at roasted leguaan's tail, and to be thankful for a good many other weird dishes which I had, perhaps, better not particularise.

Varied as was our diet, however, our work was now monotonous, and, as it lay in ground already described, would be of little interest to the reader ; and a few weeks later we returned to Port Nolloth and Cape Town. Before proceeding to the latter I travelled again to Steinkopf to endeavour to find out more of a certain big diamond that a native had once sold there for a waggon and a number of oxen, but could get no definite information, as the man had left the mission some time. Mr. Kling, however, promised to get me full information later ; meanwhile he was confident upon one point : the stone had come from somewhere above the Great Falls, and my thoughts travelled back to Brydone's story and the " pans " of the Kalahari.

Meanwhile these two long trips in the least-known part of Klein Namaqualand had made a profound impression upon me. True, we had tried in vain for

gold, but we had been misled into frittering much valuable time away, and, considering the size of the region we had penetrated, we had, after all, barely scratched it. There were hundreds of reefs we had not even sampled, hundreds of gullies where the most promising-looking gravels lay deep and undisturbed, for we had been handicapped by the Namaqualander's greatest handicap—want of water. Copper there was in bewildering abundance, galena, iron, and the other base metals on all hands, and in the few places where water had allowed of "panning" the results had often been surprising. But widely distributed as were these mineral riches, it was perfectly obvious that to exploit them to any advantage would mean a colossal scheme with a colossal capital.

CHAPTER XII

BRYDONE'S DIAMONDS—THE GREAT FALLS OF THE ORANGE—MOUTH OF THE MOLOPO—BAK RIVER—THE GERMAN SOUTH-WEST BORDER—KAKAMAS—LITTLE BUSHMAN LAND.

In Cape Town I found a most encouraging budget of news awaiting me from my energetic friend in Upington. Ever since my return from Rietfontein through that unsophisticated village (?) he had been collecting and collating every scrap of intelligence he could gather relating to the old legend of a rich diamond-mine in the Noup Hills, below the Great Falls of the Orange, and which for shortness I shall refer to as "Brydone's diamonds"; and he had come to the conclusion that not only did the spot exist, but that he had sufficient data to enable him to proceed directly to it. The only doubt he expressed was whether the spot would be found to be on British or German territory, for everything pointed to its being just about where the twentieth degree of east longitude formed the boundary between the two. Probably, had I been critical, I should have discovered that a good many of his deductions were far from logical; but his glowing accounts tallied greatly with my own belief and with the vague stories I had heard from both natives and whites, and any little hesitation I felt was finally disposed of by still another urgent letter and some wires conveying the satisfactory news that a guide had been found who could take us to the actual spot. That settled it, and I immediately set about looking for a partner, and soon found a most satisfactory one in the person of a German named Paul, who had been a most successful diamond-digger at Harrisdale and Bloemhof, and who wanted a few more. In addition to his expert qualification as a digger, I felt that I had been lucky in striking this

man, for he told me, as soon as I broached the subject to him, that he had heard of this spot whilst in German West, and had even made an attempt to reach it, but had been prevented by the authorities. Here then, apparently, was additional proof that this Golconda existed ; a bargain was struck, and we were soon on our way to Upington. Except for the fact that, during a bitterly cold night in a Cape cart on the veldt between Prieska and our destination, I contracted pneumonia, we reached our enthusiastic partner in safety, and after a few days' annoying delay, during which I coughed and fumed and fretted and feared that someone would forestall us, we started off in the most overcrowded Cape cart I have ever squeezed into. Paul was a big, hefty chap ; de Wet, our guide, at least a six-footer ; Smidt, the driver, bigger still ; and Borcherds, the "cheerful optimist," weighed about as much as any two of them put together. We had reduced stores to a minimum, expecting to shoot for the pot ; tools also were but few ; for were we not to be led straight to the spot where we could pick the diamonds up ? But even so, there were certain essentials : guns, a pick and shovel, a water-cask, emergency rations, sleeping-gear, etc. ; and when, after several readjustments, I got all the foregoing jammed into, or tied on to, the cart, we suddenly remembered that a place had still to be found for me. However, a Cape cart is a wonderful vehicle, and at last it was managed, and we trotted out of Upington on September 13th, 1911, the observed of half its inhabitants—two of whom again paid me the compliment of trying to jump my claim by the Gordonian method of "following" a mile or two ahead. We had six spanking mules, and made good progress downstream, near the bank of the river, which is here very beautiful ; smiling "lands" of wonderful fertility showing what irrigation can do with the belt of silt brought down by this Nile of South Africa : vineyards, orchards, cornlands, lucerne, oranges, fruit-trees—and all flanked abruptly by stony sterile desert or red

sand-dunes, outliers of the Kalahari stretching to the north. Into these dunes the "road" soon led, and within a few miles of Upington the mules were straining at a cart up to the hubs almost in heavy sand.

At nightfall we were at Keimoes, a most fertile little village, afterwards made famous as the scene of a fight with the infamous Maritz, who was wounded there. Here we slept, and getting away early and pressing on the whole of the day, were at North Furrow, opposite Kakamas, by nightfall, having done a good fifty miles of extremely heavy going in a little over a day and a half. Kakamas itself, the "Labour Colony," the pioneer irrigation settlement of the Orange River, is on the southern bank and we were on the northern, and I had no opportunity then of seeing the actual village. We passed the night at Krantz Kop, with a most hospitable storekeeper named Miller, whose well-stocked little Winkel was at that time a good 200 miles from the railway (at Prieska), and the last store, indeed almost the last dwelling, in British territory. Here a few well-disseminated lies as to our destination had the effect of ridding us of the claim-jumpers, who had kept in sight of us from Upington, and who rode away before daybreak the following morning in the wrong direction entirely. From Krantz Kop downstream towards the German border the roads are atrocious for a few miles, and then cease altogether. The only track leads away from the river, crossing stony kopjes where every step tempts a smash-up, and leading directly towards a formidable barrier of red-hot-looking peaks. The surroundings become wilder at every step, and the strange shapes of the peculiar-looking vegetation, *koker-boomen* (*Aloe dichotoma*), thorny candelabra euphorbia, and a variety of *melkbosch* exactly like gigantic asparagus, lend a weird aspect to the landscape. The prevailing granite—pinkish and speckled with a profusion of rock garnet—is broken by numerous quartz reefs which, as one approaches the German border, gradu-

ally change from pure white through every shade of pink to the most beautiful of rose quartz, which in numerous instances becomes amethystine and ranges from heliotrope down to deep purple. Many of these reefs are full of large crystals of jet-black tourmaline, beautifully faceted, and often as thick as one's wrist.

On the horizon, westward, a jagged line of fantastic-looking peaks show faintly blue in the shimmering heat, prominent among them being the two pointed *spitz kopjes* which mark the spot where the Molopo joins the Orange. Away on the left, and across the river, lies a long ridge of queer-looking peaks outlined like a cockscomb, and especially noticeable even in this land of violent colour contrasts, for they are jet-black as though made of coal. There is no sign of habitation or life, for with the exception of the small farmhouse at "Omdraai" ("Turn back"), the whole country is uninhabited, except for a few nomad Bastards or Hottentots.

By midday we were at "Waterval," where, in a canvas hut, we found Oberholzer, a Dutch farmer who probably knows more about the Great Falls than anyone living, and who had acted as guide to most of the rare visitors who have from time to time made their way to that most marvellous natural wonder. To reach the Falls, or a view of them, a guide is absolutely necessary, for access to them from the north bank is both difficult and dangerous, and indeed can only be obtained when the river is low.

Above the actual cataract the river, split up by numerous islands, is almost a mile in width, and to reach the main channel where it takes its huge leap several minor streams have to be first negotiated.

The first of these we waded through, following our guide most carefully, for the water was up to our waists, and the current strong and rapid ; moreover, we had to grope for footing on a narrow ridge of rock, uneven and slippery, full of sharp points and pitfalls, and with deep water on either side of it. Orange River water is always turbid, and the treacherous

bottom was quite invisible; moreover, the ridge did not run straight, but zigzagged, and altogether the passage of this preliminary channel was by no means pleasant. Another foot of water would have rendered it perilous, two feet would have made it wellnigh impossible for the strongest swimmer, for the rapids immediately below lead to one of the side-falls.

Once across and we were on an island of sand and silt, split up into deep channels by past floods, and with plenty of big trees; then came more rapid streams, which, however, were easily negotiable over the huge granite boulders that encumbered them. The last of these side-streams was running in absolutely the contrary direction to the others and the general course of the river, and, following it, we came to an open, boulder-encumbered spot, where it disappeared, but where we could still hear it rushing swiftly deep beneath us. And then came chaos: huge monoliths of riven rock, the size of houses, strewn and heaped about in the wildest confusion, piled on each other, balanced and tottering, a maze of bare stone without a vestige of vegetation. And now the dull murmur that had scarcely been noticeable became a muttering thunder of appalling depth: and emerging from a rift in the labyrinth of granite, we stood suddenly on the edge of a profound chasm, over the farther lip of which, a few hundred yards upstream, the huge muddy volume of the Orange was hurtling in one stupendous spout. The scene was absolutely terrifying, for the dark precipice, smooth as though chiselled, and dank and slippery with the incessant spray, fell sheer away from our very feet, and where it did not actually overhang, offered no foothold even for a baboon, whilst clouds of spray drove round us, and the solid rock trembled with the monstrous music of the fall.

Rapidly converging from its width of a mile upstream, the Orange at this spot becomes pent in a deep channel, self-worn in the solid granite, until, when it takes its final plunge, it is concentrated into a terrific spout barely twenty yards in width, which

hurls itself with incredible velocity over the precipice a sheer four hundred feet into the gloomy abyss below. And with the plunge it practically disappears into the unknown, for many miles penned in a gloomy cañon, quite unapproachable and scarce to be obtained a glimpse of, till it emerges into a slightly wider bed close to the German border; thence it winds a tortuous course through solitary, wellnigh unknown and uninhabited country, for the last two hundred miles of its course to the sea; surely the most lonely and deserted of South African rivers? For, with the exception of the tiny police posts at Scuit's Drift and Ramon's Drift, not a habitation stands on or near its banks, through all those tortuous reaches that wellnigh encircle the mountains of Richtersfeldt, whose solitary peaks and ravines I have already made shift to describe.

Higher than the Victoria Falls, and more than double the height of Niagara, the Great Falls of the Orange lack the spectacular beauty of either of its famous rivals. Impressive they are, but the impression they leave is of terror rather than of pleasure, of awe rather than of beauty. There is no "fern forest" such as lends romance to the Zambesi fall; on all sides nothing but riven, shattered rock, sheer precipice, and giant buttress, a nightmare of barrenness, of desolation so appalling that one might well be standing in some other planet, some dead world from which all sign of life had long since vanished. The vegetation of the side-streams is hidden by the chaos of rocks near the brink of the cañon, and animal and bird life there is none, for all live things seem to shun the spot. This absence of vegetation and of life makes it additionally hard to realise the stupendous height of the main fall; the enormous smooth cliff opposite, the giant boulders, all confusing one's sense of proportion.

Discovered by the traveller George Thompson in 1824, they were named by him the "Falls of King George," but are generally known as the "Great Falls"; whilst to the writer's way of thinking, their

native name of "Aughrabies" is far more fitting than either of the others.

Gloomy and terrifying as was the spot, it fascinated us and we could not tear ourselves away, but sat and watched the thunderous, ever-changing chaos of falling foam, speculating on what sight it would present in flood-time; and with the thought came the reflection that the Orange often rises 20 feet or so in an hour or two, and that we had been sitting there some hours already, and that a couple of feet would maroon us beyond all hope! I mentioned this great thought to the others, and the "time" we did back to the first and worst side-stream would, I am sure, have done credit to any athletic meeting's records.

Some day, when civilisation shall have spread so far, there will of course be safe bridges over these side-channels, and mankind will be given an opportunity of seeing what no man yet can possibly have seen at close quarters and lived, the Orange River in flood, filling not only its self-worn channel, but spreading all over the lip of that nightmare of an abyss in one appalling maelstrom. Anyway, we got back safely, though sure enough the water had risen a good 6 inches since we crossed it before, and it was time to get going, for we were after better things than waterfalls; and bidding good-bye to Oberholzer, who prophesied our return, beaten, within a couple of days, we started again towards the blue peaks that beckoned to us from the German Border.

"You'll maybe get as far as 'Wag-Brand,'" were Oberholzer's last words; "not that you'll ever get the cart there, but on foot you may do it: then you'll have to come back. There's a bit of a footpath that far, but it ends on the bank of the river, and you can't get farther that way. Good-bye, so-long; see you back in a couple of days."

However, we had long since learnt to take nothing for granted, and so we struck across rough but still negotiable country, away from the river, and hoped for the best. And our luck held, for though we had

to zigzag in and out of huge boulders and round granite kopjes that barred our way every few hundred yards, we still managed to keep something of a course, and made steady progress. At every step the country grew wilder and more interesting; moreover, its general characteristics resembled those narrated in Brydone's narrative so closely that our conviction grew at every step that we were indeed on the path of the man who, forty long years before, had penetrated this wild country and brought out a fortune. Rocks and ridges of startlingly vivid colours criss-crossed with numerous quartz reefs, in which the huge black crystals of tourmaline were exceptionally prominent; bright red and yellow sandstones, bare, clean, and looking red-hot in the bright sun, with prominent serrated ridges, and kopjes of jet-black and shining dolerites, amongst which the frequent outcrops of beautiful rose quartz showed up in startling contrast. Every dry stream-bed (and they were many) was full of large water-worn blocks of this lovely pink, translucent stone.

Now, Brydone had mentioned blocks and fragments of "rock crystal" in his narrative, and we concluded, much to our own satisfaction, that he must have referred to this remarkable quantity of rose quartz, and welcomed it as a proof that we were hot on the scent. Late in the afternoon we entered a most picturesque bit of country, where the fantastic kopjes were standing in small but thickly grassed open spaces, and where the usual sand-rivers were bordered with thick vegetation, principally of *cameel-doorn* trees, upon which the yellow bloom was thick, and the air full of its fragrance. This pleasant spot, I afterwards learnt, was known as "Knog Knieu" by the Bushmen, who made almost their last stand here.

The only possible track trended downwards, sometimes a faintly defined footpath, where it was often necessary for the whole party to combine forces and roll huge rocks aside to allow the wonderfully mobile Cape cart to pass; at others a soft-bedded sand-river, where the going was easy, except for



HOTTENTOT REFUGEES FROM THE GERMANS AT MOUTH OF THE MOLOPO, ORANGE RIVER.



INTERNATIONAL BEACON IN THE BAK RIVER, BORDER OF GERMAN SOUTH WEST.

occasional rocky falls, which were negotiated with brake on and sled-fashion. Now the way went among peaks instead of low kopjes, and as it trended rapidly downwards, these bordering heights became veritable mountains, until late at night we were in a deep defile flanked by lofty abrupt peaks, an apparent cul-de-sac which ended on the bank of the Orange again, where the latter emerged from the cañon leading from the " Great Falls."

Morning showed us that, though the Cape cart had certainly performed miracles so far, it could go no farther. For, though the Orange had emerged from the narrow Falls cañon, it was still pent in by steep, precipitous peaks on either bank, which in parts went towering up skywards from the water with scarce foothold for a goat. Just where we were there was a dense belt of vegetation, for the side-ravine through which we had reached the main stream widened somewhat at the mouth. Among the thick trees we found a deserted hut, but the Hottentot guide we had hoped to find there had gone. However, de Wet had been to this place before, and he said we could get downstream to the mouth of the Molopo, where we should find a few Hottentots who might act as porters, for the cart must go round. By going back to Waterval and taking a circuitous route, it could get to a spot near the German border, and there wait for us, whilst on foot we explored the maze of unsurveyed peaks between, and in which our goal was believed to lie. So we unpacked sufficient food, arms, and other necessaries for a week, and our driver turned back to try to circumvent the mountains. We were now absolutely " on our own," each man having from sixty to seventy pounds of impedimenta to " hump," and before we had gone a mile down the difficult bank of the river we were fervently praying that we should find Hottentots at the Molopo; otherwise, once we really got amongst the mountains, instead of skirting them, we should be terribly handicapped by our loads.

In places the path was treacherous, smooth, water-worn granite rocks sloping steeply, straight into the swift, muddy current below; at others it widened into a belt of thick and tangled wood, in which pheasants and guinea-fowl were calling, and grey monkeys chattered in the thick trees. At length our way was barred by an exceptionally formidable peak rising sheer from the water, and we followed a faint and difficult spoor leading over its steep flank inland. On cresting the ridge, we saw that, though the country beneath us was still broken and rugged in the extreme, it was comparatively open, and that for some miles, at least, the river was no longer pent between formidable walls of rock. On the south bank loomed a huge red mountain, flat-topped and striking-looking, even in this land of strange-shaped mountains. This mountain—"Zee-coe-steek"—as it is called, is the highest point in the Kenhardt district, and during the Boer War a helio station was established on its summit; but this had long been abandoned, and the southern bank in its vicinity is almost as unknown and deserted as the wild hills in which we were searching.

Opposite this mountain, and near the mouth of the Molopo, we found a few Hottentots, who made a beeline for the hills the moment they saw us. Luckily two ancient hags and some pot-bellied little kiddies could not get away, and when they found who we were, and that we gave them tobacco and sugar instead of the sjambok, they hobbled off into the rocks and soon brought the refugees back. They had taken us for Germans, and their actions spoke volumes as to how they fear the white men on the other side of the border. They were all refugees from Damaraland, who had fled after the brave fight put up by Marengo against the Germans had finally ended in their defeat. In this remote spot, cut off by difficult mountains and uninhabited country for many miles in all directions from even the nearest dwelling, they had existed unmolested, seeing scarcely a white man a year, yet always in fear lest their old

taskmasters should appear on the scene. They existed chiefly on the milk of a few goats, honey from the wild bees in the rocks, dassies (rock rabbits), and barbel caught in the river. In a short time they were chattering and clucking round us in high glee, but though we promised them good pay (or its equivalent in goods once we got to the cart) to guide us and act as porters, they were most reluctant to do so. They feared to go into the wild ravines we were bound for, fearing thirst, the leopards with which they said the mountains swarmed, and most of all fearing the Germans, whose patrol parties were often to be met with on our side of the border.

But at length our arguments prevailed, upon a solemn promise that if we penetrated German territory, as we fully expected to do, we should in nowise force them to accompany us.

Having made the old women happy with tobacco and tea, we once more started, this time in light marching order with the Hottentots as porters, towards a peculiar conical kopje a mile or so down-stream, which denoted the mouth of the Molopo.

We found the ancient river-bed (which can be followed right through the Kalahari to Kuruman) dry, and choked from bank to bank with huge mounds of sand, but a little farther up its course, where the banks were still exposed, there was ample evidence to show that in the not far distant past a huge volume of water had flowed. Even the miserable little channel, worn deep in the débris that chokes the old bed, and which shows where an occasional trickle of water finds a way down after rain in the desert, was now bone dry, and it was evident that once away from the Orange we should have anxiety about water.

It was on the western bank of the Molopo, on a ridge of abrupt kopjes leading to the higher land to the north, that our guide, de Wet, had stumbled on the old waggon in a recent trip, and from it we hoped to be able to shape our course for the diamonds. We found the remains of the vehicle as he had described it. It was obviously very old, the natives knew

nothing of how it had come there, there was no vestige of path or spoor anywhere near—in fact, it seemed incredible that it should ever have been dragged there at all. But there it was, and, taking stock of the wild surroundings, we felt more certain than ever that we were hot on the scent. A huge ravine had been mentioned, deep-cut and profound. There, less than a mile away up the Molopo bed, showed the entrance to just such a place, deep and clear-cut in the sheer rock as though split out by the stroke of a giant axe. And the "strangely shaped mountain" to which it led, in the narrative? We turned as one man in the direction given in the book, and there, its crest well clear of the intervening foot-hills, was just such a hill. It appeared useless to traverse the ravine, for it must lead to the hill, and there was no need to follow the devious path taken by the first man. From the height on which we stood we could take compass bearings of that hill, and cut straight across country to it.

The guides clucked and jabbered and intimated that it couldn't be done, but we knew better—or thought we did; and it did not look more than five or six miles.

Evening found us struggling in a perfect maze of deep, tortuous ravines from which it was impossible to see anything, and in which to keep even an approximate course was out of the question, and as night fell we were glad to "give it best" and turn in beside a tiny pool of stagnant rain-water which we were lucky enough to stumble upon. There was dead wood enough for a fire, and the "boys" kept it up all night, for a perfect path of leopard spoors encircled the little puddle and the Hottentots were scared out of their wits; for they credit the leopards of these mountains with a ferocity above all others—and not without reason.

We were afoot at early dawn and plunged again into the labyrinth, here and there climbing a high point to endeavour to obtain a glimpse of the peak we sought, or of some tangible landmark or way out;

but it was high noon, and we were almost dead-beat, before we at long last broke clear, and into a wide, well-defined ravine that ran in the right direction. The tourmaline crystals in the white quartz reefs abounding in this ravine were the largest I have ever seen, and there were abundant traces of tin everywhere; but we were eager for diamonds, nothing less, and pushed on, at length emerging into more open country, with our elusive hill full in sight. But alas! as we proceeded and broke clear of the surrounding rocks, we saw that instead of one hill there were three—four—five—all the same strange shape, all alike as two peas! Truly an *embarras de richesses*, for this multiplicity either meant we were on the wrong scent, or that we should have to search all of them before we could get the next landmark!

We sat down and had a meal of sorts before tackling them, and very little was said, Borcherds' cheery remark that there would be a mine in each of them being met with a cold silence. Not that anything, even silence, could be "cold" in those ravines, be it understood, for the rock was too hot even to sit upon without an aroma as of fried steak arising, and the fact that our water was nearly finished, and we had no notion when or where we should find any more, by no means added to our hilarity.

The next two days were productive of more climbing, scrambling, and general discomfort and profanity, than I ever remember concentrated in so short a time. Not that we did not find the landmarks; on the contrary, we found too many of them. For from the five hills we could see others; from each there were dozens of ravines, any one of which would answer the meagre description of the narrative, and as we plodded along from one to the other, doggedly determined to find the right one, we were eternally stumbling on something to raise our hopes to the highest pitch, only to find them dashed down immediately by some new obstacle.

We found enough rain-water to live on, though it was vile and stinking, and every hour of daylight we

searched, and searched, in vain. Apparently no human foot had ever trod these hills before, for no spoor except those of baboon, leopard, and lynx showed in the white sandbeds of the many dry river-beds; in fact, the whole region was given up to these, its only fit denizens. Except on the summits of some of the flat-topped hills there was no vegetation; there the queer-looking *koker-boom* clustered in miniature forests.

The Hottentots apparently thought we were mad, though in any case as long as they had enough to eat and drink they cared little; but even their curiosity was at length stirred, and it occurred to them to ask us what we were looking for, anyway; and in a queer mixture of Dutch, English, and Hottentot, we told them. "Oh, *that* place," said they, "where the 'bright stones' come from? *That* place, by the big mountain? Oh! that is not in *these* hills, *that* place is a long day's trek farther on; not near the Molopo, but near the Bak River, right on the German border, *that* place." Words failed. So these poor despised chaps knew the real place all the time, and we had not even asked them!

Borcherds tore his battered remains of a hat off, and jumped upon it in sheer exasperation.

"Which way?" he snorted, grabbing up his kit, and preparing to make a beeline.

But the Hottentots apparently knew no way except to get back to the Molopo, and thence follow the Orange downstream, and we did not at all like the idea of that; but patient inquiry elicited the information that the place to which we had sent the cart could not be more than half a day from where we were, and from the cart the men could find the way.

At great pains we reached an open valley that night, where at some deserted water-pits the cart should have been, but neither cart nor spoor could be seen, and we spent an anxious night, for our food was finished, and game had proved so scarce that there was little chance of living by the rifle, should

any mishap have happened to the vehicle. In the morning, however, we found it a few miles up the valley, and had the first real square meal we had had since it left us.

We consulted again as to the route, and the natives soon demonstrated that, although the valley we were in led eventually to the Orange, it was impassable in that direction, for the lower end consisted of a series of huge sheer precipices of polished granite which led like gigantic steps to the river, and down which this side-river had at one time poured in cascades similar to that of Aughrabies. To go round up-stream would be possible, but it would mean about three days with the cart, which we were reluctant to leave again.

The alternative was to climb the almost vertical mountains that barred our way, cross their flat tops and descend on the far side, a distance, we judged, of not more than ten miles as the crow flies. Time was an object, and we decided not only to attempt this path, but also to try to take a pack-horse over with us. It looked impossible, but Paul had spent a few hours in clambering the slopes and thought it could be done. So Stoffel, one of the leaders, an old horse who was used to pack-work, was chosen and packed with a miscellaneous load of food, tools, blankets, etc., round which was wound the stout rope with which we proposed to negotiate the crater in which were the diamonds—should we find it. The Hottentots were well loaded too, and altogether we had sufficient in the shape of stores to make us independent of the cart for a long time. The cart was to remain by the water-place, which was nothing but a hole scraped in the dry sand of the river-bed, but into which water soaked as fast as we could use it.

That climb was a thing to be remembered. The first hour was fairly easy, for the lower slopes, though encumbered by huge blocks of rock, were negotiable by cautious zigzagging; but steeper and steeper grew the incline, till the "capping" of about two or three hundred feet was reached, and this was almost

vertical. By working along the face, however, we found here and there a steep gully where water had worn a way, and in which there clung quite a lot of thorn-bushes and other vegetation. Up one of these we got the old nag, until it seemed impossible to get him farther, and we unpacked him and sent the "boys" on with his load to the top, where the others had long since arrived. I was loth to abandon the idea of getting him up, seeing how near the top was, and therefore started making a path, pulling here and there a rock away and making it possible for him to scramble up, disturbing more scorpions in so doing than I had ever seen before. Within 50 feet of the top, and when I could hear the other chaps laughing and talking above, I got tired of this road-making and tried to pull the old horse up by his rein. He had just reached up for a mouthful of dry grass growing in a crack, and as I snatched him a bit he reared, lost his balance, and went over with a crash. Of course I thought he was finished, for the rock went sheer down, but on looking over I found that he had only fallen about 10 feet full into the middle of a thick thorn-bush, and there he lay, on his back, with his legs wildly pawing and the bunch of dry grass still in his mouth, looking about as ludicrous an object as it would be possible to imagine. My yells soon brought the whole party down, and somehow we managed to get him out and up to the top, full of thorns, but with no bones broken, and still munching the bunch of grass.

The tableland on which we now stood was remarkable. Apparently it extended as far as the eye could reach, for this was the true level of the country, and the valleys from which we had emerged simply waterworn by erosion towards the bed of the Orange.

So sheer did these numerous valleys go down that at a few yards from the brink it was impossible to see that such depressions existed, the whole country appearing as an unbroken flat. The vegetation was entirely different to that of the lower levels, whole

forests of *koker-boomen* and other aloes, and thick-leaved succulents and resinous plants abounding.

Reloading, we made our way across this flat due west, and eventually came upon a descent as steep as the face we had climbed, along the brink of which we searched for an hour or more for a possible path, which at length we found, and got Stoffel down to a similar valley to the one we left the cart in. This, however, trended due west; it was full of pleasant vegetation too, and, better still, full of game. Here we camped, and an hour's trek in the morning brought us among formidable peaks again, whence we soon looked down into an ancient river-bed deep worn in smooth granite, and seemingly quite inaccessible.

This was the Bak River, its steep walls at this lower part of its course worn a good 500 feet in the rock, and its farther bank German territory.

And the Hottentots knew a way down, though they were already on the *qui vive* for a German patrol, and ready to bolt back into the mountains every time a dassie moved in the rocks. In this strange river-bed we made our camp, choosing one of the few spots where sand and soil had lodged and a thicket of reeds had sprung up, through which ran a trickle of water as clear as crystal, but very salt to the taste. Both above and below this spot for miles the actual bed of the river was worn so deep and smooth in the living granite that it was almost impassable for a man on foot, and out of the question for horses. In no part of the mountains bordering the Orange, where erosion has been so widespread and enormous, have I seen anything to compare with this polished granite river-bed, through which for many thousands of years huge volumes of water must have rushed from a region which to-day is one of the dryest in the world.

From the spot where we camped a side-gully led conveniently into the western bank and German territory, which at this part is as wild and unknown as the British. About a mile upstream we found the

first international beacon, standing in the actual river-bed, a pile of rough rocks surmounted by an iron plate bearing on one side the inscription "British Territory," and on the other "Deutsches Schutzgebeit." These beacons extend at irregular intervals from the Orange River right up the twentieth degree of east longitude for many hundreds of miles ; many of them are in almost inaccessible places, and have probably been seen by few, if any, white men since the International Boundary Commission first erected them ; some have been thrown down by animals or the natives, and several that I have seen have been used as targets, the iron plates being perforated with bullet-holes. For this region formed a fastness for the guerilla bands of Hottentots that put up such a game fight against the overwhelming odds of the Germans in the "Hottentot Rebellion" of 1903–6.

We soon found that, though this Bak River ravine answered to the description of the place we were after even better than the country near the Molopo, the natives who had brought us to it could not, or would not, show us the actual spot. They had all heard of it, all said it was near where we were, but there their knowledge ended.

Moreover, so scared were they at the proximity of the dreaded *Duitsters* that they were practically useless, except to gather firewood, look after the camp, and steal every bit of tobacco, sugar, etc., they could lay hands on.

About a mile upstream a faint track showed where the German patrol from Stolzenfels at rare intervals took a turn round this remote portion of their frontier, and it was interesting to note that for miles this path of theirs ran well within British territory. However, we saw nothing of them, and after days of fruitless scrambling in the wild ravines and precipitous slopes of our own side of the line, we made a systematic search of all we could cover of theirs. Day after day we started at daybreak, dividing our forces and meeting at prearranged spots, each taking a little



THE MAIN FALL, GREAT FALLS OF THE ORANGE.
The cliff opposite is about 450 to 500 feet.

food and water for the day and returning only at nightfall.

In German territory the mountains were higher than upstream, their tops wide spaces of flat table-land covered with *koker-boomen.*

From the riverwards edges of these plateaux a vast panorama stretched on every side. Upstream the winding Orange lay like a blue ribbon fallen between a wilderness of bare and riven rocks, the only vegetation visible being the thin dark line of trees lining the actual river-banks, and this in many places entirely disappearing where the cliffs that pent in the water gave no footing for even a plant to cling. For many miles the river was unapproachable, and from these high mountain-tops from which we viewed its course, a long and difficult detour would be necessary before the thirsty traveller could reach a drop of water. As far as the eye could reach in any direction no sign of habitation or of life could be seen ; all was silent, desolate, and infinitely lonely.

Our food ran short, and awkwardly enough the only game seemed to be on the German side, where we were chary of shooting ; for sound travels far in this region, and the last thing we wished for was a visit from a German patrol. Their nearest post was a bare twenty miles east as the crow flies, but twenty miles of as rough country as can be found in the rough north-west, and therefore a good two days' trek away. We found many things : copper, galena, and more precious minerals ; but search as we would, we could not find the spot we were looking for. Yet even to the last day our hopes ran high ; for whatever the origin of Brydone's narrative may have been, there was proof positive to be found in these gullies that somewhere in the vicinity Kimberlite pipes actually exist.

On one of the flat-topped mountains well within German territory we came upon the remains of a Hottentot bivouac, evidently dating from the time when Marengo and Simon Cooper fought the Germans here. Scattered about amongst the bushes were

odds and ends of clothing, German ration-tins, etc., and in one heap I found the gilt hilt of a German sword, and a pair of binoculars which had been battered and smashed to try and get at the prisms.

In one of the ravines where a thick bush known as *haak doorn* (hook thorn) abounded we found more gruesome relics in the shape of skeletons, firmly entangled in the thickest part of the bush, where they had apparently been thrown as living men.

The Hottentots claim that in this unhappy war of reprisals the Germans, exasperated by the protracted resistance of the natives, used to treat all wounded men who fell into their hands with horrible severity ; breaking their bones, and throwing them bodily into these thorn-bushes, from which a sound man could scarcely escape, being a favourite method of disposing of them.

I have had this told me by numbers of Hottentots who fought in this war, and have seen the skeletons in several places where fighting took place. The Germans claim that German wounded were thus treated by the Hottentots, but the rags of clothing clinging to the bones I saw were not part of a German uniform.

One of the most beautiful things in this wild region was the wonderful outcrops of rose and amethyst quartz to which I have already alluded, but which in the vicinity of the Bak River reached a profusion and a perfection I have seen nowhere else. Huge kopjes of this beautiful stone, of the most exquisite rose-colour, big reefs cropping out of the mountain slopes and in places crowning them, afforded a wonderful sight, especially when the early sun shone into their translucent depths. Since I first wandered there I have seen this beautiful semi-precious stone cut into jewellery, and sold in shops as " pink quartz," but in the Noup Hills by the Bak River there is sufficient of it to build a town.

A day or two before we abandoned the trip I had an adventure which might have proved more unpleasant than it did. Food was already very scarce,

and one afternoon I took a shot-gun and went down the defile to where the Bak gorge ran into the Orange. Here the river was very wide, placid, and beautiful, and in the thick trees there were pheasants in plenty; but so thick was the vegetation that to flush them was next to impossible, and it was only after hours of walking and creeping through thick thorn, and the expenditure of the eight cartridges I had brought with me, that I got three pheasants. Of the others I had hit one or two hard, only to see them fall into the high and unclimbable thorn-trees, or into the river, and missed the rest. With my last shot I began to think about getting back to camp, and found that, absorbed in the pheasants, I had made my way upstream much farther than I had imagined. It was about sunset when I realised this, and night falls very suddenly in this region, so, getting clear of the thicket, I hurried campward. But the way was not only long but difficult, cut up with huge mullahs that had been worn in the deep silt of the banks, impeded by rocks and thick bush; and by the time I reached the Bak River gorge it was as near "pitch dark" as it ever is in Gordonia.

Of course there was no mistaking the way, for once in the ravine it is almost impossible to get out of it; but the pitfalls and pot-holes in the ice-smooth granite are bad enough even in the daytime, and I blundered along through the thick bush of the lower end of the valley, cursing myself for being so late, and wondering how I should get on when I got to the really difficult bare and rocky part.

Thought of any danger from leopards never entered my head, for though there was abundant evidence that the kloofs were full of them, and we knew that they had killed lots of natives thereabouts, they kept out of our way, and though we heard them all round us at times, we had not seen them.

Now, on my way down, I had wasted a shot on a splendid *lammer vanger*, a fine specimen of an eagle that got up from a rock within shot and with a big dassie in his claws, and that I had killed. I cut his

wings, beak, and talons off, and left them hanging in a tall thorn-bush, and as I neared this spot I thought of trying to locate the bush and taking my trophy. I had just decided that I was quite near it when, just in front of me, rose a chorus of yelps and snarls, and it was evident that jackals were quarrelling over the eagle's carcass. I was feeling around for a stone to shy at the small scavengers when I heard a sound as of a soft but heavy body landing amongst gravel and twigs, another stifled yelp and then the snarling, coughing growl of a leopard, or rather of two leopards, who appeared to be carrying on a similar quarrel to the one they had so summarily put a stop to.

I realised several things instantly. No cartridges, no trees except unclimbable thorn-trees, and no matches. A fire would have scared them immediately. No way home except past them—well, I'd have to go back! I did not like the idea of a night by the river, but even that *pis aller* had to go by the board, for as I turned to sneak back I heard the cough of another leopard in that direction. Clearly this was no place for me, but what on earth was I to do? The pheasants had bled a good deal, and I was smothered in the blood, which probably accounted for the gentlemen on my trail.

Well, something had to be done, and having heard that the human voice was feared by all animals, I left off a yell that scared me so that I dropped the gun. It echoed up among the rocks like the screech of a steam-siren; it woke the baboons on the peaks and they barked back in faint imitation; far up the ravine a big owl took up the refrain and passed it on farther. The snarling of the leopards stopped instantly, and the shuffle of a displaced stone among the rocks showed they had bounded away. So, picking up the useless gun, I took my courage in both hands and "lit out" for camp. Every few yards I repeated the first yell, but when after a bit I stopped for sheer want of breath and hoarseness I heard those blamed leopards making remarks to each other

across the ravine ; they were accompanying me on either side. Long before I reached camp I was as hoarse as a crow and my yell lacked vim. I fell over rocks and into crevasses, and once glissaded down a slope of slippery granite into about 3 feet of extremely wet cold water. But at long length I turned a corner of the defile and came in sight of the welcome fire, and heard the leopards no more.

There seemed to me to be a lack of anxiety about all of the home party. Paul was asleep and snoring within a few inches of the fire, and Borcherds and De Wet were smoking and swapping lies on the other side of it.

"Hallo," said Borcherds. "Bit pleased with yourself, ain't you ?"

"What d'ye mean ?" I asked, none too sweetly.

"Oh, we heard you singing for the last hour or more," he said. "Thought you might have struck someone with some whisky."

SINGING !

We did not give up the search till our food absolutely petered out. The Hottentots lived for days on dassies, which none of us would eat, though they are perfectly clean and good eating. They cooked them by the simple process of throwing them in the fire. The hair burnt off, but formed a sort of shell round the carcass, and when it was sufficiently roasted, they simply knocked the charred part off and ate the rest. I never saw them make the least attempt to clean one.

When we finally trekked, our rations for the journey back to the cart consisted of two tins of sardines, about four pounds of Boer meal, and a tin of golden syrup.

We decided to attempt to get the old horse down the Bak River, and thence up the Orange bank, to a path that would get us back to the cart, and so, at daybreak one morning, we reluctantly bade farewell to our camp and took the back trail.

Most of the morning was spent in getting Stoffel

down smooth granite slopes by strewing sand over them, and many a slip and scramble did the old thing get, but at length we stood on the bank of the Orange; where he gorged himself with grass, and we turned to and made a big pot of "mealie pap," and divided the sardines and syrup amongst the eight of us. And leaving the "Bak" behind us, we reluctantly abandoned our first attempt after Brydone's diamonds. I say "reluctantly," for every man of us still believed that somewhere in the immediate vicinity of our late camp lay a diamond-mine.

Our journey back to the cart was a hungry but uneventful one. We found the driver on the point of clearing for Upington with the news of our being lost or captured by the Germans, for we were long overdue, and he had consoled himself by eating practically every bit of our remaining stores. Three days later we were back at Kakamas North Bank, where at the store Borcherds ransacked the whole stock for a pair of pants large enough for his ample proportions. For his only pair were in rags, our boots were in shreds, and altogether a bigger lot of ragamuffins rarely straggled over a frontier. Of course, we had had no news from the outside world since we left Kakamas on our way down, and our first anxious inquiry disclosed the fact that a messenger had been chasing me for days, with telegrams which he had brought all the way from Upington. We located him later, and one of the telegrams brought me news that immediately sent our despondent spirits up with a bound. Before leaving for the trip, I had vainly endeavoured to obtain the name of a certain individual who, years before, had sold a very large diamond at Steinkopf, which he said he had found somewhere near the Great Falls, and who, after obtaining a considerable sum for it, had gone back to Gordonia. And this wire, which had been following me for weeks, conveyed the welcome intelligence that he was a certain Hendrick, living at Kakamas—the very place in

which the wire reached me! Here was luck with a vengeance, luck which might atone for all our misfortunes—for Steinkopf credited this man, above all others, with knowing where there were plenty more to be picked up!

Cautious inquiry elicited the fact that the man was well known, and lived but a mile or two away. And without loss of time, Paul and Borcherds set out to find him. He was a sly-looking Bastard, who at first strenuously denied that he had ever been to Steinkopf, or knew what a diamond was; but when he found we were not police, and that he had nothing to fear, he owned up. Yes! he had found three—big ones. One he had sold at Steinkopf, the others he had buried beneath a tree close to where he found them, for he believed that the police were watching him, and had feared to go near the spot again. We showed him our licences, and as he assured us the spot was on Government ground, we felt that all was indeed well in this best of all possible worlds.

The wily old fox drove a hard bargain with us, and in nowise would he tell us the whereabouts of his discovery. It would take us three or four days to reach it, that was all he said, and when, in trying to pump him, we mentioned that we had been to Bak River on a similar search, he smiled grimly and said, "You were on the wrong side of the river [Orange]."

This hint excited us more than ever. How if, after all, we had been on the wrong side, and the diamonds were lying within a mile or so of us, but across the water? True, the narrative seemed to apply to the north bank; but was it not possible that some point of the journey had been omitted, and the man who found the mine might have crossed to the south bank to reach the spot? Anyway, this remark of old Hendrick made us close with him. We held a council of war, and within a few hours had crossed the river into Kakamas, and were arranging to leave at once for a flying trip—somewhere.

De Wet had reluctantly to return to Upington, and our driver would in nowise consent to stay a day longer with us, and so we gave him our blessing, and let him go back likewise.

Kakamas, the celebrated "Labour Colony," a community of over 3,000 souls living in isolation, five long days' trek from a railway, is worthy of far more space than I can afford it here. Its one long straggling "street" extends for miles along the Orange River bank, the broad, flat alluvial stretches having by irrigation been connected into one of the most fertile spots in South Africa; fruit, vegetables, and cereals growing in a profusion unsurpassed.

There are numerous schools and churches, but never a hotel or boarding-house, and the nearest doctor for this populous place was at Kenhardt, full two days' ride away. As a result, Borcherds was in demand immediately he was seen and recognised in the village, and within an hour was being mobbed.

So clamorous, indeed, were the population for his ministrations, that to us laymen it appeared quite needless for him to go away again looking for diamond-mines, with a gold-mine ready to his hand; but somehow he seemed a bit dubious about the gold!

Meanwhile we were busy. A Cape cart and good-looking team was engaged, stores were laid in, and long before Borcherds had got through with his patients we were ready. We gave him a little grace, and he lost no time in emptying his little travelling medicine-chest and joining us, and away we went westward again, this time at a spanking rate; for on the south bank there were at least some alleged roads. For many miles we still passed the straggling houses of the Kakamas colonists, which became poorer and poorer until they gave place to the hut, tent, waggon, or makeshift abode of the new-comers, who had as yet had no time to build. On through an even more remote outpost, the tiny little hamlet of "Rhenosterkop," where an enterprising Hebrew had what was not to be found in all Kakamas, a fully licensed "hotel." And thence through

country scarcely less wild and but little less solitary than that of the northern bank. Part of Little Bushman Land, this northern extremity of Kenhardt, and notoriously a waterless country. But here and there a tiny farmhouse was to be found, at each of which Borcherds was received with open arms, and even we others basked in his reflected glory. Anyhow we got milk, eggs, and fresh meat, and began to realise that he was well worth his place in the cart. This time we visited Brabies, Nous, and Onderste Zwartmodder, whence a long waterless trek of twenty-odd miles brought us again to the wild country trending down to the Orange. We finally landed on the bank of the latter again, at a place called "Nourasiep," considerably below Scuit's Drift, and many miles lower than we had reached on the northern bank. Here we found a solitary inhabitant, a Hottentot herd, who was supposed to be minding cattle, but who had evidently heard of Borcherds' being on the way, for he too was "sick."

Hendrick now told us we were within half an hour of the spot where he had picked up the stone he sold, and two others which were still buried there, and our impatience to go and fill our pockets was so great that, without waiting for a meal (and we had had none that day), we urged him to take us to it at once. He led us away from the river, uphill, among a region of wide, well-defined quartz reefs, which were here and there very highly mineralised; and after a walk of a couple of miles he brought us to what he pronounced to be the actual spot where he had found the stones.

It was a small gully between granite dykes, which were seamed with quartz reefs, and a big outcrop of hæmatite in the latter had strewn the slopes and bottom of it with black crystals of that very widespread and—in such a place—worthless metal. And amongst all this débris of iron, he swore he had found the stones. There was not the remotest indication of any diamondiferous soil of any kind anywhere near the spot, and unless the diamonds

had weathered out of the granite, or had been dropped there by ostriches, they could never have been there at all. Anyway, as Paul said, after we had searched every inch of the locality for hours, "How about those two that Hendrick had buried?"

The gentleman now said that the tree was no longer there; which was true, in so far that nothing but a couple of *koker-boomen* grew within a mile of it. Nor was there any trace of any tree having ever grown there; and reluctantly we were forced to come to the conclusion that we had been fooled again.

I am sure that, had Paul had the man on the opposite bank of the river, in German territory, he would have shot him, and I am not sure that we should have tried to prevent him.

But there was nothing to be done—he stuck to his tale, and we could not prove it a lie, and there was nothing to be done except—go back! Later, we found that, as the river was very low, the granite bed was exposed in many of the channels into which it was here divided, and in them there were many extraordinary "pot-holes" worn in the hard stone, deep and perfectly circular cavities varying in size from a quart pot to a hogshead, or larger: and we spent a day in emptying some of these, and washing the gravel always found at their bottoms. But we had no luck: garnets, iolite, water opal, and some fine amethysts there were, but never a diamond. And, sadder and poorer men, we made our slow way back to Kakamas, Upington, Prieska, and civilisation.

Whilst on my way back, I again heard news as to diamonds having been found by Bushmen in the pans of the Southern Kalahari, and this time the information was so precise that I made up my mind to apply for a permit such as had hitherto never been granted to a prospector, a permit from the Government to search for diamonds in the vast, forbidden "Game Reserve."

CHAPTER XIII

GRAVEL TERRACES AT ZENDLING'S DRIFT—SECOND CHRISTMAS AT RICHTERSFELDT—GERMAN POST AT ZENDLING'S—MAKING A RAFT—HIPPO AT THE LORELEI MOUNTAIN.

It was obvious, however, that such a permit would take a lot of time and patience to procure, and at any rate would be of no use until the long drought broke.

So I made no formal application immediately, but contented myself with taking certain preliminary steps, after which, calculating that at least three months must elapse before I could get any " forrader," I determined to utilise that period in testing the wonderful gravels near Zendling's Drift, to which I have already alluded.

They are ancient " terraces " of very large extent, and at some distance from the present bed of the Orange. Fully 50 feet above the open country they stand on they are remarkable in many respects, and their flat surfaces present a most beautiful appearance: agates, jaspers, banded ironstones, chalcedonies, and countless other beautiful pebbles lying there by the thousand tons, and all so clean and polished by the constantly blowing sand that they present the appearance of a vast mosaic. Scarlet and purple jasper, milk-white quartz, opalescent chalcedonies, black and white agates, and, most abundant of all, ironstone pebbles so beautifully oxydised by Nature's chemistry that their jet-black surfaces exactly resembled the polished gun-metal so much used for watches and other jewellery.

Except for being of a much larger grade, these gravels resembled stone for stone the deposits found at Pomona and other islands and beaches of German

South-West, where diamonds had been found so plentifully, and I was of the opinion (and hold that opinion still) that thorough prospecting would prove them to be diamondiferous. I had had no time to do any systematic work on my previous visit, but having got a friend as enthusiastic as myself to join me, an expedition was arranged, and we left Cape Town early in December (1911). Finance was extremely low, and we fully expected to have to rough it even more than usual. Only actual necessities were taken, but even the modicum of foodstuffs, tent, tools, and the bulky and essential barrels for "washing" the gravel taxed to the very utmost the only vehicle we were able to procure. This vehicle was a Scotch cart owned by a native missionary, and it met us at "28 miles," a water station on the Cape Copper Company's line from Port Nolloth. We had expected a waggon, but as vehicles of any kind are as rare as honest men in Namaqualand, we had to put up with what we could get. Naturally the load was far too much for such a cart, on such a road (heavy sand), and before we were out of sight of the lonely railway track we had stuck twice, and finally broken down. The team was the usual Hottentot mixture of cows, heifers, young bulls, and a couple of oxen, and the drivers worse than the team, and our progress was maddeningly slow.

Before leaving Port Nolloth we had heard a rumour that there was some kind of trouble at Zendling's Drift between the Richtersfeldt Hottentots and a German survey party which was about to cross into British territory for survey purposes, and with the permission of the Union Government. We could get no details, but troopers of the C.M.P. were supposed to be on their way to the spot, and these Hottentot drivers were full of the news. They were inclined to be surly and cheeky too, but as soon as we were well on the road we showed them the error of their ways in the only way a Hottentot can be taught such things, and they became extremely civil. The road was new to me, via Kalkfontein, Lekkersing,

and Chubiesses, but a description of it would only weary the reader, almost as much as the journey did us. Where it was not deep sand it was rough rocks, and for the first two days we were incessantly sticking or overturning, unpacking or repacking the cart. On the fourth day, in the middle of a wide plain of heavy sand, we ran into soft dunes in which the wheels sank up to the hubs, and here we stuck hopelessly. The oxen were suffering from thirst and would pull no more, the heat was overpowering, and our own water very short, so we decided to send half the load on and dump the other till the oxen had drunk and returned. Dittmer (my partner) and I tossed to see who should remain with the dump, and I lost, and during the rest of a boiling day I sat under a white umbrella which the missionary had forced on me, and which I was now extremely grateful for.

The team turned up again next day, refreshed, and we got through to Doornpoort, where there was still a gallon or two of water that the oxen had left.

We had fully intended reaching Zendling's Drift by Christmas, but here we were, still a long distance from Kuboos even, and it was Christmas Eve. At any rate I determined to reach Kuboos for some part of Christmas, for there at least would be clean water and a pleasant tree, where Ransson, Poulley, and I had spent our Christmas Day a year back.

Early in the morning, therefore, I struck out ahead of the cart, on which Dittmer had now made a perch, and by midday had skirted the big granite range and was in sight of the tiny Hottentot church and few *pondhoeks* of the little mission. Better, I could see the water and *my* tree, and pressed forward as men hasten homeward on such a day. Shade, rest, and plenty of water—after all I should be able to enjoy my Christmas! I reached the first little pool amongst the granite boulders ; it was crystal-clear and ice-cold, and I drank deep, and did not envy any man stronger Christmas tipple. Then I made for the tree—almost as welcome as the water

in this barren land—and promised myself a pleasant sleep till the cart came along.

But to my intense surprise, there under *my* tree lay three big troopers of the C.M.P.

I nearly dropped with surprise, for I had never met a white man near this spot before, and considered that tree to be my own particular property. I felt hurt!

They never moved, so I said, "Hullo!"

The nearest one opened one eye—"Hullo!" he echoed; to the others, "Here's Rip van Winkle."

Well, I suppose I looked something like it!—a week's beard, and the grime collected in hauling empty oil-barrels about, greasing cart-wheels, sleeping on Mother Earth, etc., being added to by the blood of a steenbok that I had shot and carried slung across my shoulders.

They turned out to be a party of mounted police under Lieutenant Burgess, which had been hurried through the wild country from Upington to Zendling's Drift on news of trouble there. They had been to the Drift, found that the Germans had decided not to venture across, and were returning to "civilisation" when I found them under my tree.

They had a waggonful of stores, and we spent a most enjoyable Christmas together.

We found the Kuboos natives extremely surly and suspicious; it was evident that they resented the visit of the police, and we could get no one to take us farther till after Boxing Day, when at an exorbitant price we succeeded in getting a waggon, and reached the Drift on December 28th. Here we pitched camp in a pleasant spot by some trees close to the river, which was in flood and higher than I had hitherto seen it. The waggon turned back to Kuboos, and we were alone.

About a mile downstream, and opposite the German police post, there was a tribe of Hottentots encamped, and from them we expected to get a sufficiency of labour, but we found that they had acquired the Christmas habit and were all drunk, insolent, and inclined to be dangerous.

At length, after a long powwow, I induced two of them to join us for good wages and plenty of tobacco, and we got the camp shipshape, hoping that their spree would not last longer than the New Year.

Meanwhile the river rose rapidly, a brown swirling torrent of some 300 yards separating us from the German bank, whilst downstream the roar of the rapids warned us when bathing to keep out of the main current.

We had hoped to get a certain amount of game, and an occasional sheep or goat from the natives, but their crowd of mongrel dogs had caught or driven away the former, and they demanded an exorbitant price for the latter, so that we had for a time to depend on our tinned stores.

Occasional Hottentots still crossed the swollen river to and from the German camp by means of their swimming-logs, and on New Year's Eve we received a courteous message from the Wachtmeister in charge asking us to come over and join them. I did not like to leave our belongings to the mercy of the drunken Hottentots, so declined with thanks, but there was no reason why both should remain, so Dittmer sent an answer saying that, though a poor swimmer, he would try. I tried to dissuade him when I found he was a long way from being a strong swimmer, for the water looked very ugly, but later the messenger returned with a more urgent invitation and—a life-belt! I had never expected to see such a thing in Namaqualand, but the Germans are nothing if not thorough, and I found later they had about fifty of them at the post!

So Dittmer went, and I fell to cooking a fine wild goose that I had shot, for he promised to return and dine with me. But, alas! I had to eat it alone. However, he turned up before midnight, in state, accompanied by several natives with mouth-organs, and having had a glorious time. So enthusiastic was he, in fact, that I had great difficulty in preventing him from blowing up the whole of our dynamite to welcome in the New Year.

With its arrival we started work in earnest ; a few more natives joined us, and we began our testing of the gravels.

We had hoped to get donkeys, oxen, or horses from the natives, but these had been driven away into the mountains when a rumour had spread that the Germans intended crossing, and nothing would induce them to bring them back. So that the large amount of water necessary even for "hand-washing" diamondiferous gravel had to be hand-dragged from the river to the deposits nearly a mile away, and this handicapped our operations considerably. Still, so promising were the indications that we were full of hope and enthusiasm, and worked from daylight to dark.

Meanwhile the Hottentots kept up their reputation for laziness and deceit ; our gang was never full—except of honey beer—which they made from a big haul of wild honey that they had made in the rocks just before our arrival, and on which they got gloriously drunk every day. They plundered our stores in our absence from the camp, and we were obliged to take turn about in remaining there ; kind treatment was taken advantage of, and when we simply *had* to sjambok them they ran away. Moreover, those who did work clamoured for fresh meat, and this we could not obtain except from their drunken old headman, Klaas Fredericks, who asked prices out of all reason. Once or twice after a big drink these thieving, poaching scoundrels came to the camp in the evening and demanded tobacco, etc., and became threatening when we refused, but the sight of a couple of rifles always stopped them. Still, there was very little chance of doing much under such conditions, and so exasperated did we become that we should have welcomed an open outbreak by the brutes, which would have given us an opportunity for a lesson in the shape of a few bullets. Our nearest policeman was at least five days away—and we had no horses. To add to our annoyance, the river rose again with startling rapidity, until it threatened to burst through an old channel behind



PACKING THE CART FOR THE JOURNEY.



DUMPED WITH MY BELONGINGS IN THE DESERT WHILST THE OXEN WERE DRIVEN ON TO SAVE THEM FROM DYING OF THIRST.

our tent and completely maroon us. That this had happened before was amply evident, as many of the larger thorn-trees showed traces of having been more than once almost completely under water.

Moreover, the intense heat, hard work, and hard living had told on both of us, and on more than one occasion we were down with fever at the same time; and we were deaf and nearly blind with quinine and mosquitoes.

Still, we did not like to strike camp, but one day, after both of us had been queer with fever, it occurred to us that we should be in a very bad plight indeed if we got too ill to get about, for the Hottentots would be more likely to rob us than help us! We therefore attempted to make a raft, so that if need be we could get across the river to the Germans, from whence at intervals there was communication with the outside world.

A boat would have been better, but that was out of the question, so we contrived a curious arrangement in the shape of a T of tree-trunks, at the three extremities of which were lashed a couple of small water-casks and an empty oil-drum. The whole thing was tied together with rope, wire string, and *ruimpjes*, and we also contrived a couple of crutches as rowlocks and a pair of sculls. We found when it was finished that the only way to float on it was with our legs in the water, and the first time we ventured across it appeared highly probable that the current would take us into the rapids before we got to the German bank; but we got across somehow, and felt that we were no longer in danger of being marooned.

Afterwards we went across on several occasions, and always received courtesy and civil treatment from the German police. These police were a military body and were all picked men, only soldiers who had attained the rank of sergeant in the Imperial Army being eligible. Their quarters were extremely comfortable, and they were well and regularly supplied with rations by camel transport from the far-distant railway at Aus. They had all sorts of

queer pets—baboons, monkeys, and various kinds of wild-cats caught in the dense bush of the river-bank.

The post, built well back from the river, commanded a fine view of all the approaches to the Drift on the British side ; they had a deep well close at hand, which made them independent of the latter, and a pleasant feature was an experimental garden, where all manner of plants, both African and European, were being grown in the prolific Orange silt.

A fine fowl-run and an apiary gave additional proof of their industry, and considering their distance from civilisation, and the fact that the post was barely eighteen months old, they had done wonders ; but any admiration I felt for them and their work died a sudden death when I walked through that same garden, and found that the work was being done by Herero prisoners working in chains. Not light chains, but heavy manacles on legs and arms, and neck and waist, manacles that were never taken off till they knocked them off when they died. These men, as far as I could gather, were " prisoners of war " only—not criminals in any sense of the word as we understand it. I am no negrophile, but German methods of treating natives are far too heartless for " the likes of me."

The day after our first visit to German territory, the clan of Hottentots that had proved such a nuisance flitted, taking with them most of our able-bodied men, and we saw them no more. The few that remained worked better without them ; but as Klaas Fredericks had taken every goat and sheep with him, we could no longer give our labourers the *vleesch* they insisted upon, except by going far afield and bringing back an occasional buck.

Thus, with our difficulties always on the increase, we spent a couple of most arduous months, only deterred from throwing up the venture by a firm belief that the diamonds were there somewhere ; often ill with fever, hard up for food, and quite cut off from all news of the outside world. Our only amusement was in trapping animals as the Germans

did, improvising traps from spare sieves, and baiting them with small birds. Scarce a day passed but that the traps were full, and in this manner we caught, alive and unhurt, wild-cats, ratels, iguanas, and several of the beautifully spotted " leopard cats "—or genets, to give them their proper name. On more than one occasion a *muis-hond* (the South African skunk) got into the traps, and made its presence known by the most appalling smell, and a tree leguaan (iguana) once gave me an awful shock, for he lay so quiet under the leaves covering the sieve that I thought it was empty, and the dart of his head—so like that of a snake—made me fall back in the thorn-bush, for I thought I had bagged a huge puff-adder.

Towards the end of our stay provisions got so low, and game so wild and scarce, that we had to spend most of our time after it, and one day, whilst looking for a square meal, I had rather a peculiar experience.

About two miles above the Drift, and near the Lorelei Mountain, we spotted a flock of ten or a dozen wild geese floating near the German bank, and Dittmer emptied his magazine at them, killing three. The river was still in flood, and with the perversity usual in such cases, the geese floated into the German bank. We wanted them very badly, and as Dittmer could swim but little, it was up to me to go across and get them. Helped by the current, I got across the muddy, turbulent water fairly easily and got the geese, and as I had drifted a long way downstream, I got out with the intention of walking up the bank to opposite where my clothes lay. The thicket on the north bank was dense and teeming with monkeys, baboons, and all sorts of animal life ; it was thorny too, and I was as full of spikes as a porcupine, as I picked my way gingerly along the bank upstream, feeling horribly helpless—for, naturally, I had nothing on but a hat—and looking out carefully for snakes.

Seeing an open space with tall reeds, I decided to cut across it, but had scarcely got among the bush

vegetation of this swampy place, when at my very feet I saw a huge spoor in the black mud, so freshly made that the water still oozed into it, and at the same time heard an awful snoring grunt close to me, answered by another, and realised that I was right among a herd of hippo. I had seen traces of this small herd before at their favourite haunt, higher up near the Great Fish River. There were but four or five of them, but remnants of the hundreds that swarmed the Orange when Alexander first crossed and described it.

As a rule, of course, hippo are harmless, but at times the huge brutes are mischievous, and I did not stay to inquire what kind of mood they were in, but sprinted back across the river in a manner that left little to be desired. But I brought the geese.

At length food and labour became so scarce that we were compelled to give up ; a messenger was sent to Kuboos, and a few days later the waggon made an appearance. We struck camp, filled in our prospecting-holes, blew up our dynamite in a deep pool in the river, as a parting salute to the Germans, and took the home trail, feeling that we had put up a good fight against sheer bad luck. Lack of natives and other adverse circumstances had hampered our work so that, in spite of our own hard labour, the few holes we had been able to make had been no real test of the huge beds of gravel, which, with proper appliances and systematic testing, will very probably some day yield very different results.

Our bad luck lasted us right to Cape Town. The waggon got hopelessly stuck in the Holgat River, and delayed us so that we missed the only decent boat at that time running, had to kick our heels for an interminable week in Port Nolloth, and finally were obliged to take passage in a glorified tug, with several other unfortunates, and take ten long days in coasting round to Cape Town—a trip of 36 hours by the boat we had missed! Moreover, we were loaded from cut-water to taffrail with a cargo of guano, the concentrated odour of which was the only thing we

tasted during the whole of the voyage. Dittmer landed ill, and within a few days was down with diphtheria, which was generally ascribed to the rough living and bad water we had to put up with during the trip, but which I put down to that over-generous diet of guano.

CHAPTER XIV

PERMIT FOR THE FORBIDDEN GAME RESERVE—VAN REENEN AND THE SCORPION—SECOND VISIT TO THE GREAT FALLS—OLD GERT, OUR GUIDE—BUSHMAN ARROWS AND THEIR POISONS—BUSHMAN INOCULATION AGAINST SNAKE-BITE—ANTIDOTE FOR SNAKE-BITE—TALES OF "THE GREAT THIRST."

THE trip had given time for certain preliminary plans to mature, and immediately on my return I made a formal application to the Department of Mines for permission to enter the Kalahari Game Reserve, and bring out proof of the existence there of certain diamond-mines.

I pointed out my reasons for holding the belief of their existence, also that the country was badly in need of revenue, and that the Premier Mine had that year contributed no less than £600,000 to the Union's finances.

And, I argued, there might easily be several "Premiers" awaiting discovery in the Kalahari, and to find them would not cost the Government one penny; for, given the desired permission, I would find the necessary finances myself. All I stipulated was "Discoverer's Rights" (half the mine) should I bring out the proof—so that the Union Government stood to win half a diamond-mine to nothing over the transaction. As I fully anticipated, the Department of Mines didn't see how it could be done! The territory mentioned was "forbidden" to prospectors, no one was allowed to enter it, it was the breeding-place of Royal game, no one had ever been granted such a permit, etc.—all of which I had acknowledged in my application. And finally—and best reason of all—the Mines Department added that in any case the Reserve was

not under its jurisdiction, being still in the hands of the Cape Provincial Council, and the Administrator; Sir Frederick de Waal. This gentleman being unfortunately absent on tour, I was again hung up; but I made another formal application to him, and strove to possess my soul in patience, what time letters and wires from Upington urged me to "get a move on," for heavy thunder rain had fallen in the desert, and t'samma would soon make the trip possible.

As I firmly believed in my ability to obtain the permit sooner or later, I made arrangements for waggons, stores, etc., to be in readiness, and retained the guide I have previously mentioned, and another one in Upington, whom my energetic friend there had been months in tracing, and had finally secured.

But alas! "the best-laid plans of mice and men gang oft agley!" as this one did; for after a long, long wait I received a point-blank refusal from His Honour the Administrator, who again informed me that the Kalahari Game Reserve was "closed to prospecting" as it was the "breeding-place of Royal game."

Now, I am as good a sportsman as the next man, and a firm believer in game-preserving, but considering that I did not propose to ever need more than a square mile or so of the (approximately) ten thousand square miles given over to the Reserve, this harping on the rights of a few gemsbok to keep me from a fortune only made me more determined to get it, and I again went to the Department of Mines—this time with more success.

At any rate I this time obtained a sympathetic hearing, and finally, after many rebuffs and months of delay, during which waggons, horses, oxen, and guides were "eating their heads off," I had the supreme satisfaction of obtaining the desired permission. In it the Honourable the Minister of Mines agreed to allow me to enter the Reserve for a period of three months, to start from the date I left Upington, to search for the "supposed pipe," conditional that I undertook the work on behalf of the Government,

and at my own expense, etc. etc.; also that a policeman should accompany me on the trip, and that I paid half his salary during the period he was with me.

The latter gratuitously humiliating condition was afterwards withdrawn, as it was found impossible to arrange for a camel police trooper to be spared for the work, and I and my assistants were graciously given permission to proceed without such escort.

By this time it was the end of September 1912; over six months had been taken in obtaining the permit, the t'samma season had come and gone, and the torrid heat of a Kalahari summer was at hand. It would therefore have been madness to attempt the expedition until some months had elapsed and young t'samma had again made its appearance—for upon the precarious patches of these little wild melons we should have to rely for a substitute for water, in this wild stretch of parched sand-dunes. Anxiously we therefore waited through the long summer days of October, November, and December, for news of the first rains, and it was not until January 1913 that news came from Gordonia that the first t'samma was beginning to make its appearance, and that it was considered safe for us to start.

One of our guides had most inconsiderately died whilst waiting, but the other, with waggons and trek animals, drivers, "boys," etc., still awaited us, and on January 26th, 1913, our little party left Cape Town for Prieska and Upington, where lay our transport.

I had two partners, E. Telfer, a young and enthusiastic Scotsman of many years' Colonial experience, and W. van Reenen, a still younger Cape Dutchman. Both were seasoned men, and though the desert would be new to them, they were both good shots, good horsemen, and thoroughly versed in farming, transport, and veldt craft, and I had little fear as to their ability to see the thing through. Our outfit was chosen with great care, for we knew that, once away from Upington, our waggon would be the only source of supplies—food, arms, ammunition,

clothing, tools, and above all, medicine. As we hoped to establish a water depot within transport distance of the nearest well, we had a number of specially constructed tanks made—designed especially to pack on camel or oxen—but these, unfortunately, were of no use to us.

At Prieska all this paraphernalia was transferred to transport-waggons, whilst with our lighter gear we hurried on to Upington to prepare for the real desert trek.

The monotony of the Prieska to Upington trail has been referred to before in these pages, and a description of it would be of little interest. The drought had not broken here for many months; in the tiny village of Marydale no shower had fallen for two years, and hour after hour we trotted through a brown, dreary, dusty, verdureless expanse, where never a blade of grass or a green leaf could be seen as far as the eye could reach.

Carcasses of horses, mules, oxen, and other animals lay by the road every mile or so, and spoke rather too eloquently of the toll the terrible drought was taking upon the transport animals, and the flocks and herds of the farmer. Our driver gave us gruesome accounts of farms whose owners had neglected to trek with their livestock whilst the veldt still held good, but had waited, hoping for the ever-promising rain, waited until their last drop of water had dried in their vleys, wells, or pits, and every nibble of herbage had been cleared off the face of the land, and who had lost every head of stock they possessed. Transport was almost unobtainable, for every pound of forage for the animals for the long trek of 150 miles had to be carried on the waggons, leaving room for little else! Water, even at the regular watering-places, was so scarce that a heavy charge was made for each animal drinking, and it seemed that, if the drought did not break very soon, the route would have to be utterly abandoned.

And day after day the heavy storm clouds gathered, dark, lowering, and threatening (or rather promising)

torrents of the longed-for rain, a promise that seemed never to be fulfilled. This gloomy state of affairs was by no means encouraging, and our driver, when he found out where we were bound for, laughed, and told us that we were mad to make the attempt. He said that the farmers between Upington and Rietfontein had suffered worse than any others, and that a bare week ago he had spoken to a camel policeman from the north, who had told him that not a drop of rain had yet fallen, and there would be no t'samma! So we were most anxious to get to Upington, to find out the truth, for this gloomy account was an entirely different story from the cheery optimism of the recent letters and wires we had received.

Apparently, however, whatever might have happened in the Kalahari during the last few months, it was certainly raining there now, for as we got farther north, the whole horizon in that direction appeared covered with a dense bank of clouds, from which lightning frequently flashed. It seemed as though a perfect deluge must be falling there, and we took heart of grace, and even wished we had brought our mackintoshes.

The evening before arriving at Upington van Reenen had a nasty experience. We had outspanned at a spot only a few hours from Upington, and had made a large fire in order to roast a porcupine van Reenen had shot earlier in the day. It was nearly nightfall, and the sky was dark and lowering, whilst distant thunder could be heard northward. As we sat by the camp fire, a sudden gust of wind scattered the embers in all directions, and this was but the prelude to a furious gale that came tearing along at whirlwind speed, bearing with it not only embers, but hats, kettles, big flaming branches from the fire, and almost blinding us with a thick cloud of dust. The morsels of porcupine went flying into the cinders, and thence all over the veldt, as the wind whisked the heart of the fire away; through the blast of sand and small stones came a few drops of rain, and a vivid flash of lightning, with a simultaneous peal of

heavy thunder right over us, showed that we were in for one of the sudden storms peculiar to the place and season. In a few minutes it was pitch dark, and we were scuttling all over the place, in a vain endeavour to retrieve all sorts of belongings that the wind had snatched away even from the shelter of the waggon. In a quarter of an hour the worst was over, though still the wind howled across the shelterless veldt, and we began to collect the scattered firebrands, and built another fire. Van Reenen, determined to sup off porcupine, crouched down by the embers, and began cooking fresh slivers of the rank-smelling meat, when suddenly the driver yelled to *pas op* (look out), for the scorpions were " trekking." Rain, or a heavy dust-storm, will always bring out these little pests in swarms from the holes and crevices in which they hide, and I knew that in such cases they simply ran " amok," travelling with tail erect, looking for trouble, and lashing out at anything living that came in their way. But I was hardly prepared for what followed the driver's warning, for within a minute or two the veldt was literally alive with the venomous little pests, numbers of them walking straight into the fire, where they squirmed and sizzled horribly. Van Reenen, intent on his cooking, only swore a little as he brushed one or two aside, and took them far too lightly, for suddenly a big black specimen ran along his bare arm, and stung him on the big vein on his wrist, causing him to drop the second lot of porcupine steak, and let off a yell that scared the whole camp.

There is nothing more painful than a bad scorpion-sting, but as a rule they are not particularly dangerous. This, however, was an exception, for the symptoms that followed were alarming in the extreme. As quickly as possible the sting was scarified and treated with permanganate of potash, but within a few minutes the arm had swollen to an enormous size; and although I bound a ligature tightly above the wound, the glands of the neck, arm-pit, and groin became similarly affected, the jaw stiffened, and other

most alarming symptoms showed themselves. Van Reenen was almost mad with pain, and, strong as he was, he was soon in a state almost of collapse.

We had a small bottle of brandy, and this we poured down him at once, without the least effect, and for hours we walked him up and down, to prevent him from falling into the deadly stupor that followed the first effect.

For days afterwards his right arm was quite useless, and the experience made him extremely nervous whenever scorpions took a hand in our proceedings, which was pretty often, for the desert swarms with them, and scarcely a morning passed but we found three or four of the venomous things snuggled in between our blankets and the sand on which we had lain.

We found the Orange at Upington extremely low, and even the favoured river-lands not wholly free from the effects of the drought.

News from the desert was very conflicting. The farmers were suffering badly, and *veldt* for transport animals along the route to Rietfontein was practically non-existent, but most of them seemed to believe that heavy rains had fallen in the actual reserve eastward, to which we were bound.

Into this large tract of country no one ever went, except an occasional camel trooper, and their infrequent partols did not extend farther than the large pans known as "Aar Pan," "Gunga Pan" and "Betterstadt Pan," which were said to lie about twenty miles from the western edge of the desert. A patrol had passed that way about a month previously, and had seen no sign of rain having fallen, but Bushmen had reported that t'samma was flourishing farther east, and the only way to find out if such was the case was to go in and find out for ourselves.

In Upington we were lucky in finding Lieutenant Geary, the officer in charge at Rietfontein, who was down on a holiday, and who very kindly filled in the approximate positions of the above-named pans on my



"CANDELABRA EUPHORBIA."

The Bushmen make arrow poison from this.



"OLD GERT."

My guide in the Kalahari, and for many years a chief of Bushmen there.

map, upon which the vast Game Reserve was simply a huge blank space, marked "Unexplored." These pans he had visited himself on camel-back, and he was sceptical of our being able to reach them in any other manner. But camels, we found, were quite unobtainable in Gordonia, the Rietfontein police being the only people who had any, and they, it appeared, being so short that to lend us any was out of the question.

Meanwhile, as we had hopelessly out-distanced our heavy transport, and could not start till its arrival, we arranged a flying trip to the Great Falls, hoping to obtain a successful film of the wonderful cataract ; for with an appreciation of the fact that we should be visiting places where not even a photograph had been taken before, we had obtained a cinematograph camera and many thousand feet of film.

Although the volume of water was not so great as on our previous visit, I was more impressed than ever with the solemn and desolate grandeur of the place, and above all with the fact of so much potential energy being absolutely unutilised, and the strange anomaly of a huge body of water, in a land where it is such a scarce and valuable commodity, running absolutely to waste.

The views were obtained with considerable difficulty, for, as I have before described, the Falls are very difficult of access, and to obtain a frontal view of them we had to operate the machine from a tiny ledge of rock overhanging the abyss at a great height, and so small that the third leg of the tripod-stand could find no footing, but hung out over the precipice, whilst the two of us operating hung on by our eyebrows to it and to the trembling rock. I was profoundly thankful when it was all over, and we were back on firm ground again, with what we hoped would prove a very fine and unique film.

This preliminary canter over, and once again in Upington, we settled down to preparations for the northward trek, for our heavy belongings had

arrived in our absence, and we were anxious for the road. Both guide and waggon were ready, the latter belonging to a young Dutchman named Gert du Toit, who was familiar with the fringes of the Reserve, and who was himself most anxious to accompany us ; for he, too, had heard of, and believed in, the diamond-mine. And to give him his due at once, no better sportsman or companion have I ever roughed it with either in Africa or elsewhere.

Old Gert Louw, my guide, was a most remarkable old chap. Full of veldt lore, and at one time famed as a hunter, his knowledge of the Kalahari was unequalled. For many years of his young manhood he had been the chosen chief of all the Bushmen that wandered there, and knew every "pan" in the whole vast expanse.

He had no idea of his own age, but must have been well over ninety ; but he was still alert, keen-eyed, and full of intelligence. But Bushman chief as he had been, old Gert was not a Bushman born. Son of a Boer father and a Hottentot mother, and born in the Kenhardt district, he had, whilst still a youth, wandered with other hunters into the Kalahari in search of ostrich feathers and skins, and there, joining a Bushman tribe, had eventually become their chief—apparently by the simple process of eliminating all his rivals by means of the flint-lock, with which he had been an unerring shot, and against which the poisoned arrows of the little Bush folk had very little chance.

Not that he despised the arrows altogether, but learned to shoot well with them, and had many a tale to tell of the myriad head of game that the little flint-pointed darts had brought down for him. He told me of the poisons the Bushmen used, poisons so virulent that a scratch from an arrow dipped in either of them meant death to man or beast within a few minutes. The huge "baviaan" spider provided one of these. Caught at a certain season, these venomous insects were pounded between stones, and the resultant paste exposed to the light of the

moon for several nights before it was fit for the arrow-tips. Another favourite poison was made from the viscid juice of the *Candelabra euphorbia*, and this also was prepared with certain rites and observances in which the moon again figured. Both these poisons were so rapid in effect that the Bushmen, shooting at game with their arrows thus poisoned, made little effort to do more than pierce the animal's skin, nor troubled to pursue their quarry, leisurely following the spoor in the certainty that the wounded animal would be found dead at no great distance. Peculiarly enough, these poisons, though so virulent, had no ill effect upon the flesh of the animal slain. These arrows were never used for war. For this the favourite poison was obtained from certain portions of a putrefying corpse, and, according to Old Gert, a man wounded with a war-shaft poisoned with this awful venom died horribly of lock-jaw almost immediately.

Even when iron was obtainable, it was rarely used for arrowheads, the Bushmen preferring those of flint, agate, or bone, as the poisons were not so effective on the iron barbs.

The old man's gnarled and wrinkled body was covered with scars, and he had a tale to tell of each. The raised tattoo marks upon his chest were tribal marks, given to him with weird ceremonies when he was admitted to the "blood brotherhood," whilst directly over his heart was a circle of little cuts, showing where he had been inoculated with snake-venom and made immune from their bite. He described this as a fearful ordeal, under which men often died, but which, when they survived, "made them snakes themselves," as he expressed it. Neither puff-adder, ringhals, cobra, or night-adder would attempt to bite a man thus transformed; and he claimed that, if he came near a snake, it would remain rigid, and allow him to handle it with impunity. Certainly he showed not the slightest fear of them, though I noticed he invariably carried the Hottentot antidote for snakebite about with him. This antidote

is a small low bush with yellow flowers, found in the Kalahari—but nowhere very plentiful—the parts used being the dried roots and small twigs. The inoculation is carried out with the venom of the cobra, which is captured alive, and forced to bite the patient or novitiate over the region of the heart. Meanwhile he is held by two men, who watch him, and administer the antidote only in small doses, and when the poison seems likely to gain the mastery, they rub the perspiration which pours from him into the bite. In common with every Hottentot and Bushman ever met, Old Gert believed the sand-gecko to be the most deadly of all poisonous reptiles, though scientists assert that it is absolutely harmless!

He showed us a bite on his knee, which he solemnly asserted was made by one of these little lizards many years before, and which had nearly killed him, his whole body swelling, and his jaw being locked for days!

For many years the old pagan had been virtually King of the Kalahari Bushmen, with henchmen and wives galore, hunting the ostrich for its plumes, and the lynx, leopard, lion, and jackal for their valuable pelts, bringing in his commodities twice a year to the white men at Klaas Lucas Kraal, Kheis, or Griquatown, and returning with his waggons full of Manchester goods, sugar, coffee, and tobacco, and above all with *dop* sufficient for a glorious jamboree.

He told me many gruesome tales of the "Great Thirst" (the Kalahari), where even the Bushman is occasionally unwary enough to stray too far from t'samma and dies hideously of thirst. He had wandered northward to N'Gami, and westward to the wild coast near Portuguese territory, where the Kunene runs into the sea, and long before a German flag was ever hoisted in that north-western part of Damaraland. Once, after many days of trekking and half dead with thirst, he shot and wounded a bull eland, and following it, found water in a pit in a desert pan.

Drinking it, three of his four horses fell dead

almost at once. He and his companions got away, but no less than 43 out of the party of 46 Bastards following them were poisoned, the three who escaped being young children.

Dop, Hottentots, Bastards, and white men between them had long since wiped out his tribe of Bushmen, and the old man had settled down at Upington with a new tribe of children and grandchildren; but his heart's desire was the desert, and he was frantically eager to be back among the dunes. He knew the pan where the other Bushman had picked up the diamonds; he knew also a pan where the garnets and carbon lay thick in a soft yellow matrix, which, by its description, could be nothing but "Kimberlite"; and, more remote than any of them, he knew a similar pan, where there was a big limestone capping, in which were dotted bright green stones innumerable.

I showed Old Gert my collection of stones, and he picked out my one tiny emerald unhesitatingly from among half a dozen others—green gems, peridotes, green garnets, chrysophrase, tourmalines, etc.—and in addition described the precise crystallisation that the emerald takes.

Anderson was credited with having found emeralds in the Kalahari; I myself had picked up beryls—of which they are a variety—in abundance in German territory, west of where we were bound; and to add to the likelihood of there being emeralds as well as diamonds in this "Tom Tiddler's Ground," I heard from Mr. H. S. Harger, a well-known Johannesburg gem expert and geologist, who happened to be in Upington at the time, that some years back no less than £40,000 worth of fine rough emeralds had been sold in Hatton Garden—and that it was believed by all the *cognoscenti* that they came from the Kalahari!

On Saturday, February 17th, all was at length ready. We had discarded every bit of superfluous gear, and our waggons were packed with all that we expected to need during our long trip; our rifles and shot-guns hung from straps, ready to hand for the

game we hoped to kill along the path, and we were armed with an additional permit from the Resident Magistrate, authorising us to take these weapons into the Reserve—a permission which had been omitted in the Government permit, and without which the first police trooper we met would have promptly hauled us back in ignominy.

CHAPTER XV

THE "PANS" OF THE KALAHARI DESERT—THE MOLOPO ROUTE—BOOMPLAATS—ENTERING THE RESERVE—SPOORS—THE WATER CAMP—THIRST—THE GREAT SALT PAN—LOST!

THE first few days of our trek lay through the route referred to in Chapter V—the post road to Rietfontein and the north. Except that both grass and water were even scarcer than on that occasion, everything was exactly the same—the infrequent "homesteads," naturally somewhat dirtier and more dilapidated, and the accumulation of dead animals and similar horrors somewhat increased on account of the drought. This latter, however, did not appear to be as bad as we had been led to expect, as water was still plentiful at the usual wells and water-pits. The veldt was very bare, and Du Toit was often obliged to drive his tired oxen many miles from the outspan before he could get a mouthful of grass for them.

So our trekking was of necessity slow, and, on account of the great heat, most of it was done at night. Thus we crawled through Areachap, Steenkams Puts, Grondneus, and Zwartmodder, into the old bed of the Molopo, where there was water in the deep wells, but fodder was non-existent, and the oxen apparently lived on pebbles. We were now skirting the south-west extremity of the Reserve, which stretched east in a vast, dim, featureless, and apparently boundless world of sand-dunes, but the spot at which we intended entering it was still days to the north. The few habitations became fewer and wider apart, a long day's journey of heavy sand-dunes usually dividing "neighbours" in this lonely fringe of huge desert farmlands on the Kalahari border, and water being unobtainable in between

them. In fact, numbers of these vast surveyed desert farms had neither permanent water nor habitation on them.

Ten days of trekking, and our eyes were gladdened by the most welcome of all sights in such a country, a large vley of water, in which cattle stood knee-deep, and over which flew Namaqua partridges in countless thousands. This was "Abiqwas" Pits, close to the tiny police post of "Obopogorop," where two unfortunate young police troopers were stationed, within a mile or so of the equally desolate German border. Here we shot partridges to our hearts' content, browning the big coveys shamelessly, for cartridges begin to be valued by the time one has spent a few months in the veldt.

There were several waggons here, Boer families trekking to Upington for their periodical *nachtmaal* (communion), which festivity, if it may be termed as such, appeared to be the one exciting event of their dreary, monotonous existence. They were incredulous as to our being allowed into the Reserve —with rifles!

"*Allemachtig!*"—why, then, should we *verdommte uitlanders* be allowed in the Reserve, when *they*, who lived on its border, scarce dare follow a strayed beast a day's trek into it without the police being after them?

But there—we should see! The police would take but little notice of our precious permit, and we had better look out! They were cantankerous and surly, and evidently wished us all the bad luck they prophesied. According to them, there was no t'samma in the whole Reserve; we should die of thirst.

We asked them how they came to know this, considering that they professed never to have been in the forbidden area. They said they had "heard so."

We had no *dop* to placate them with, though we made coffee all day long for them. They were living on mutton, or goat, rather, when their half-bred greyhound lurchers failed to bring down a buck for them, that is to say; for they were out of cartridges

too. And when I say "mutton"—I mean just that—not with its attendant "fixings" of potatoes, or carrots, or turnips, or caper sauce, or even bread, but just *vleesch* along with every meal, every day! They had been out of Boer meal for weeks, so there was no bread, or even mealie pap, to accompany it; the meat was hacked off in shapeless chunks, and half-boiled in a Kaffir pot, or thrown in the embers, and torn apart by the teeth as a native would tear it—cinders and all! Coffee they had not seen for weeks, using as a substitute a vile-smelling and vile-tasting decoction made from the root of the *wit boom* (carrion-tree). Yet these men had property, broad farms (even though of poor land) and plenty of flocks and herds, and undoubtedly a goodly number of sovereigns tied up in a skin bag, and buried somewhere in or near the hovel they called a "home."

The only time they relaxed their sour visages was when, after tobacco and coffee and the loan of all the meal we could spare had failed to make them more companionable, we had the happy idea of inviting them to try our rifles. Then they became quite jocose, and as we had plenty of rifle cartridges, we had a regular Bisley of it there in the sand-dunes. They were good shots, but only when they could choose their own position—that is to say, lying down. This, of course, not only gives them a better chance at game, but is their normal posture. Stand and shoot they could not, and their attempts at doing so were weird and wonderful.

The abundance of water at Abiqwas Pits made us careless, for the next day, after passing a most desolate little homestead called Klip Aar, we discovered that each man had left it to the other to see to filling the water-casks, with the result that they were all empty, and we were in the middle of a long waterless stretch.

The driver said he knew of an old water-hole a mile or two from the trail, and that evening late we turned off towards it. Though we had only been without water since morning we were parched, for

the heat had been at its very height. We found the "pit" all right, a well of about 40 feet deep, covered with a sheet of galvanised iron, and a splash from a dropped stone showed we had come to the right place for a cool, deep drink.

Hastily we lowered a bucket and heard the delightful cool "splash, splash," as we hauled it up with thirsty anticipation. I had a tin beaker in my hand to get first dip, but van Reenen, always the thirstiest, was not standing on ceremony, but flung himself down and tilted the whole bucket to his lips, and simultaneously with the yell he gave as he emitted that long draught came a SMELL! There are no words to describe it! . . . Rotten eggs and black powder principally, perhaps, and scientifically I believe it was only sulphuretted hydrogen, and rather healthy than otherwise; at the same time I quite sympathised with the near-side leading ox, who promptly kicked van Reenen severely when he hopefully offered the innocent animal the remainder of that bucketful. These aromatic wells are called *stink water* or *stink fonteins* by the Boers, whose language is both terse and expressive. Fourteen days from our leaving Upington we arrived at the farm from which we proposed to enter the Reserve, a place called Boomplaats, where the dry Molopo—which most of the journey had been bare of trees or any vestige of vegetation—was scattered with magnificent camel-thorn trees of great age and girth, and shaped like a very symmetrical oak. Here there was a small homestead and good water, the owner, a well-to-do Boer named Rauchtenbach, had plenty of trek animals and waggons, and we hoped to be able to arrange for water transport to our first camp, as far as practicable eastward in the Reserve.

Rauchtenbach assured us that there could be no t'samma for months, as he had entered the Reserve after strayed cattle a few days previously, and had for a full day's journey seen no sign of rain having fallen, without which there would be no t'samma.

Old Gert had wished us to enter a day farther

south and make for "Aar Pan," where he considered it would be best to work from to locate the nearest diamond pan, but we had feared to venture with the waggons until we had spied out the land.

On hearing Rauchtenbach's report as to the non-existence of t'samma, however, the old man again strongly urged his plan, and now claimed that there was a deep pit at Aar Pan, where water had never failed in his day, and that there would be no danger in trekking on. However, it would mean at least two hard days' trek to reach it with the waggons, and should there be no water we should scarcely get the oxen out alive, for though these Kalahari cattle can go that time (four days) without great inconvenience when simply ranging the veldt, it is quite another matter when they are hauling heavy waggons through deep sand and over veritable mountains of sand-dunes.

Were the water there, however, it would make matters easy for us, so to make sure we decided to send Du Toit in with a native on horseback to find out how the land lay.

He was gone two days, and came back with the horses absolutely exhausted. The pit was there, but it was bone dry, there was not a drop of water between the Molopo and the pan, and although there was an abundance of grass, the horses had suffered badly: for it too was dry. Of the various succulent sorrels and other juicy plants and grasses that spring up immediately after rain there was not a vestige, nor of t'samma.

This was bad news, and we now for the first time realised what the failure to obtain camels would mean to us.

Our specially made water-tanks would be almost useless, and our idea of pack-oxen as bad, for obviously they could not carry water for their own consumption, and could therefore only work within a very limited radius of the water base. We were two months too early, the reports as to t'samma in abundance that we had received before leaving Cape Town were without foundation; and as we could not afford to

wait, there was nothing else for it but to attempt to arrange a water depôt as far in as practicable, and do our exploring on foot.

Rauchtenbach strongly advised us not to make for Aar Pan, but to camp at a spot about eighteen hours' trek due east of his farm, from which spot we should be within a reasonable distance of the better-known pans, and which would be the farthest distance to which he would be able to convey water for our actual need.

As Old Gert knew this spot and approved of the plan, this was agreed to, and we trekked up to the water-pits at the northern part of the farm, from which we should in future draw our supplies. For days past the clouds had hung heavily to the eastward, and it appeared to be raining in that direction, though so far no drop had fallen near us during the whole journey; but as we now trekked towards the well, a violent sandstorm came up behind us, and within a few minutes of its overtaking us we could scarcely see a yard. We were sitting in the after-part of the waggon, talking to Du Toit, who was holding on behind, when suddenly he gave a yell and began dancing and kicking frantically.

"There's a snake up my leg!" he shouted, and we jumped down just as a frantic kick sent it squirming and wriggling into the sand, whence it made off like greased lightning. We killed it under the waggon. It was a young *geel capell* (yellow cobra), about 2 feet long, quite big enough to have killed Du Toit, who was very lucky not to have been bitten. All kinds of reptiles and venomous insects seem to "trek" and run amok during these sand-storms, probably seeking for shelter from the rain that usually follows. In this case the rain followed immediately, thunder-clouds rolling up all around with incredible rapidity, and before we could properly cover the fore-part of the waggon, the longed-for rain was pouring down in sheets. In a few minutes it was pitch dark, except for the vivid lightning, and we huddled in the waggon under a big buck-sail which covered and half



ON THE GREAT SALT PAN, IN THE CENTRE OF THE SOUTHERN KALAHARI DESERT.

suffocated us—four white men and half a dozen Hottentots. So heavy was the downpour, and so near the almost incessant flashes of violet lightning, that the driver himself crept under the sail, and his weird screams at the frightened oxen, the roar of the wind and thunder, the crash and bump of the waggon as the scared animals scuttled along at their own sweet will, the darkness, heat, and perfume of Araby from the sweating natives, all combined to make that little joy-ride a thing to be remembered.

Eventually a big tree-stump brought the waggon to an abrupt stop, and the storm ceasing as suddenly as it had begun, we were able to get a light and disentangle ourselves from the most appalling jumble of gear imaginable. Guns had fallen from their slings, clothing, boots, cartridges, food, and Lord knows what, were piled all around and on top of us; but all might have been well had it not been for young van Reenen, who had taken advantage of the darkness to abstract a tin of marmalade from the "scoff-box" and was, as he confessed, making good going, when the waggon hit a snag, and he lost the run of the tin. Every blessed thing in the waggon was sticky for days afterwards.

At the pits we left our reserve stores, every available utensil was filled with water, and in addition two hogsheads belonging to Rauchtenbach were lashed upon a further waggon; the oxen drank their fill, and we made our entry into the Reserve.

On leaving the Molopo, in which the well was situated, we immediately entered the Reserve, the huge sand-dunes here trending in the right direction, and for a time making the going fairly easy. For in the long valleys between the wave-like dunes the sand was comparatively firm, being bound by various stunted roots and grasses, mostly dry, and showing but little signs of life, but capable of bursting forth into luxuriant growth with astonishing rapidity at the most meagre encouragement in the shape of a passing thunderstorm.

The bare-looking little bushes were principally

the *drie doorn* and *zout bosch* common all over South Africa, whilst here and there on the slopes of the dunes were thick *haak doorn* bushes of vivid green. These were covered with huge cocoons, the size of one's thumb and very firmly attached to the twigs. This cocoon is of the consistency of very tough, thick cardboard, and contains a large black larvæ which is eaten by the Bushmen, who utilise the strong case for snuffboxes, etc., also making bracelets and anklets of them, stringing them together, and placing small stones inside so that in their favourite " baboon dance " they give forth a swishing, rattling sound with each movement. They also eat the huge white maggot which bores so freely into the larger gum-trees, scorching them on hot stones as they do their other *bonne bouche*, the locust.

As we got farther into the dunes, the going became more and more difficult, for the long parallel waves of sand, though trending at first south-east, soon curved away from our course, and we were forced to cross them, diagonally at first, but later they lay right athwart our path. So high were they, so steep and close together, and so soft the sand near their summits, that our progress became slow to a degree, and only possible at all by infinite labour and difficulty. Often the second team had to be outspanned and added to the leading waggon to haul it over the crest of some sand-mountain, whence it plunged down a perilous slope, to encounter a similar obstacle immediately. In addition to this laborious crawling over wall after wall of sand, the hollows between were now frequently honeycombed with the huge holes of the ant-bear, or the burrows of large colonies of musk-rats, meer-cats, jackals, porcupine, and other small animals, amongst which the oxen fell and floundered, at imminent risk of breaking their legs, and we were therefore often forced to make tedious detours from our already difficult course.

Track or path, of course, there was none. We were making our own waggon-path through country where no waggon had ever ventured within the

memory of Rauchtenbach's Hottentots who were guiding us. No sign was there anywhere of a man's footprint, though the soft sand was as a closely written page with the spoors of countless animals.

Dainty little *slots* of steinbok and duiker, quaint little hand-like paw-marks of the porcupine, dog-like pads of the jackal ; here a wide swath of country trampled and torn up by the sturdy hooves of a vast troop of trotting gemsbok, proud monarch of these desert wastes—there the fast trail of a pack of the ferocious wild hunting-dog, most dangerous and destructive of pests. Huge spoors of the ostrich, like a grotesque, deformed human foot, and showing by its gigantic strides where the big bird had flown like the wind before us ; tiny, dainty pads of wild-cat and genet, larger ones of the *rooi kat* or lynx, and, too frequently to be pleasant, the big spoors of the treacherous sand-leopard, which, when wounded, is more to be feared than the lion. The queer-looking footprints of the *tijger woolf* (spotted hyena), with two huge paws and two quite small ones, were often to be seen covering these spoors of the leopard, showing where the hulking, cowardly beast had followed the bolder animal, content to eat his leavings when he had killed and eaten his fill. And prominent among all these signs of the dune-dwellers were the huge claw-marks of the giant *gom paauw*, a magnificent game bird of the bustard family, which attains a weight of 50 lb. or more, and which, superb in spread of wing, could be seen getting up from the crest of the dunes well in advance of the waggon. With the exception of these fine and wary birds, and of the noisy korhaan, whose harsh, warning cackle sounded from all quarters, no game whatever could be seen, for the yells of our drivers, the cracking of whips, and the creaking of the waggon gave plenty of warning of our approach.

Moreover, here, deep in the dunes, our scope of vision was extremely limited. In the hollows between them nothing could be seen except the crest of the sand-wave we had passed or were climbing, and the

long narrow *straat* on either hand, whilst from the crest itself vision was bounded by the nearest dune a few feet higher than its neighbours, and rarely could a view be obtained of anything more than a few hundred yards ahead. Occasionally we climbed one of the most prominent dunes, and could see an apparently limitless expanse of wave after wave of dunes, covered with grey-green grass and scrub, monotonous in form and colour, and with no single distinctive feature, as far as the eye could see. No landmarks, no paths, each dune the counterpart of its neighbour, nothing to guide us, nothing to rely upon but the sense of direction, this waterless wilderness made it easy to understand the tales of men who had wandered in a circle for days searching vainly for t'samma or water or a way back, and dying within a mile or so of safety.

With an occasional brief outspan, we trekked all afternoon, evening, and throughout the night, for the drivers were most anxious to reach our camping-place before the sun gained power the following morning, and with the exception of a precarious perch now and again on the waggon, we walked the whole time. Towards morning the steep and difficult dunes came to an end, and we entered a *straat* a hundred yards or more in width, and trending in the right direction. Here the going, after the switchbacking of the previous twelve hours, was easy and pleasant, and we climbed thankfully into the waggon, and had just fallen asleep, when a chorus of yells and shrieks and the waggon coming to a standstill woke us all up again. Rauchtenbach's waggon with the water-supply, which had been leading, had crashed into a big ant-bear hole and overturned, and one hogshead lay broached with all its precious contents spilt in the thirsty sand, whilst several of the smaller tanks were badly battered and leaking.

We lit fires of dry *toa* grass, outspanned the oxen, and all hands had to turn to and worked hard till daybreak before we salved the rest of our precious water and were ready to trek again; and the sun

was high in the heavens, and both the oxen and ourselves about played out, when, after negotiating a few lines of extremely steep and difficult dunes, we came upon a small pan from which stretched a broad straight *straat* leading due east, and which was the spot Rauchtenbach had recommended as a camp. His judgment had not been at fault, for the position was admirable. He had gauged the capabilities of the oxen to a nicety, for it was quite obvious that they could not have dragged the waggons farther with a reasonable chance of getting back to water; the *straat* was open and of firm sand, in which tents could be pitched without fear of being blown away; there was an abundance of dry firewood in the shape of old tree-stumps all along the ridges of the flanking dunes, and the small pan showed traces of having held water, and in the event of rain would hold it again. And, best of all, in the immediate vicinity was an exceptionally high dune, from which we were able to distinguish several of the larger pans eastward, and which would form a most useful landmark as to our camp's whereabouts when we wandered far afield.

There was grass in profusion—dry, but still good food for the cattle, and barely three dunes' distance north we found a tract of sand where a heavy shower had fallen some time before, and where the t'samma was already beginning to bloom.

So that everything looked *couleur-de-rose*, and we unpacked stores and tools, pitched our tents, and prepared our camp with a light heart. In the evening the water-waggon left for the return journey, and not before it was time, for the hollow flanks and staring eyes of the poor beasts showed that they were suffering from thirst already. They were to return in a week with a further supply, meanwhile, in spite of the loss of one of the hogsheads, we should have sufficient.

The first two or three days were spent in exploring our immediate neighbourhood. North and south, the dunes were very formidable and close together, and half a day's toiling in either direction disclosed

nothing but the same endless succession of long serried lines, ending in confused and broken country eastward. This preliminary canter was to enable us to get a general idea of our immediate surroundings, and gradually we were able to add other landmarks to our friendly big dune, a solitary *wit boom* tree, scarcely 10 feet in height, but looming up like a forest giant, and prominent for miles in this treeless waste, a clump of *haak doorn* bush, or a peculiarly bare patch of sand, all helping us to steer a course without the tediousness of working by compass, or of having to always follow the return trail over own our spoor. Gradually, too, the seemingly featureless contours of the dunes, each at first appearing the counterpart of the adjoining one, became distinguishable, and we began to gain the facuty of acute and mechanical observation of trifling differences essential for the long journeys we were preparing for in this pathless and unexplored waste.

From the " lookout " dune we studied the country eastward. Almost due east, and apparently only about ten miles distant, a line of pure white sand-ridges showed the position of a big pan, which Old Gert recognised as a famous hunting rendezvous of the Bushmen in his day, and taking his bearings from it, he showed us, several points south of it, a long humped dune which apparently rose to a great height above its surroundings, and which towards evening loomed up like a mountain. This, he said, was " Aar Pan," and from it he could locate pan after pan, including those which we were in search of. But the time of all times to locate these distant depressions was at daybreak, when for a short period before the sun actually rose, a small, distinct, and well-defined cloud could be seen floating low down over each of the larger pans, due doubtless to the moisture evaporating from their firmer soil, and which was wanting in the loose sand of the surrounding dunes.

The furnace-like heat continued, though each

afternoon storm-clouds gathered, and apparently heavy rain was falling eastward, especially in the direction of Aar Pan, where Old Gert assured us water would now be found.

Our anxiety, however, was not now so much about water, but about Old Gert himself, for he had contracted rheumatism so badly that he could scarcely hobble, and it soon became apparent that, until water fell in the pans, or t'samma made it possible to employ a riding-ox to carry him, we should have to rely upon his instructions, and search out the places for ourselves.

Aar Pan we could not miss, and thence the nearest pan where diamonds had been found was but half a day's trek. The others were several days' journey distant, but this nearest pan appeared an easy task to find. Gert tried to dissuade us, however, and suggested that we had better first try to locate a vast salt pan at one time well known to the natives, and which should be, he considered, about six hours' trek due east, and impossible to miss. The locating of this pan would, he explained, help us greatly in our further operations, and we accordingly set out early one morning with the intention of finding it.

Du Toit, van Reenen, and myself made up the party, as Telfer was indisposed. Each man carried only a water-bottle, a little food, and a rifle, for we fully expected to reach the pan by midday, and be back by night.

Experienced as I thought myself in the desert, that first walk eastward, so lightly undertaken, was to provide a lesson never to be forgotten.

For an hour or so the almost straight *straat* in which the camp stood led in the right direction, due east. It ended in broken dunes, very high and confused; still, we were able to keep the general direction for another couple of hours, when we had the "luck" to strike another series of dunes and *straats* apparently in a beeline with our objective, and we pushed on, congratulating ourselves that by noon we should reach the Salt Pan. Unfortunately,

however, the rough country had thrown us a point or two out of our bearings, and this easy, wide, and seductive-looking *straat* fooled us nicely. For, as we afterwards discovered, it not only started slightly in the wrong direction, but curved so gradually as to deceive us completely, and without even a glance at the compass we toiled on till the terrific heat of the blazing sun right overhead showed us that it was noon, and our burning feet and aching calves urged a halt. There was an abundance of low bush and thick grass, but not a tree anywhere, and we threw ourselves down and rested for a while in the blazing sunshine. We had been walking about six hours with scarcely a breather, and even allowing for slow progress in the broken dunes, we had, we calculated, come a distance of at least twelve miles, and should be near the Salt Pan. But the crest of the dunes showed us no break in either direction, and with a brief rest we pushed on again for about an hour, when the end of the *straat* came in sight, barred by formidable dunes running right across it. Evidently there was no salt pan in that direction, and a tardy look at our compass showed us that we had gradually been turning from our course, and were heading north-east instead of east. Had we been sensible, we should have turned back to camp, whilst there was still time to get within sight of it by nightfall, but we were so chagrined at having neglected to steer a straight course that we wrong-headedly determined not to return till we had found the Salt Pan. It was a foolish decision. We had brought only a little water, and most of it had gone already, for there had apparently been no need to economise, and we had even given a few precious drops to the two wretched dogs belonging to Old Gert, which had followed us in spite of all our attempts to keep them back. The scorching sand had already played havoc with their feet, and at every short halt we made they scratched themselves frantically into a hole in the sand.

It was about two o'clock, and there was therefore

about six hours' daylight left to us as we left the *straat* and plunged into a perfect chaos of broken dunes, from the crests of which the whole of the circumscribed expanse from horizon to horizon revealed nothing but a featureless ocean of ridges.

In vain we swept it for some recognisable landmarks, our big dune near the camp or the vastly bigger one that marked Aar Pan ; but either they were hidden from view by intervening dunes, or were no longer recognisable from our new viewpoint.

"Either straight back on our spoors or due south," said Du Toit, and as we thought of Old Gert's sardonic grin when we told him we had not found such a big space as the Salt Pan, we unhesitatingly turned due south.

Late in the afternoon, already nearly played out, we crested a prominent rise, and saw an exceptionally high dune a good deal east of us, and from its base there seemed to stretch a white flat space, though but little of it was visible. Evidently this must be the Salt Pan, and we concluded that Old Gert had been mistaken about the time needed to reach it, and that we had not been so far out of the course after all. So we headed for it, thankfully trying to forget that we had scarcely any water, and that we should have a long, thirsty day's trek back on the morrow. The dune was a great deal farther off than it appeared, and seemed to recede from us ; but the pan at its foot showed more plainly from the brow of every dune we toiled over, and at about sunset we struggled clear of the sand and stood on the edge of its flat surface. It was about a mile in width, almost a perfect circle in shape, and across its broad surface there trotted away from us a fine troop of at least a hundred gemsbok, which halted every now and then to stand like statues, gazing back at the intruders. Then, again, a big bull would give a toss of his four-foot horns, and a stamp, and instantly the whole body would break into a rapid trot, keeping line and pace, and wheeling

and changing direction as might a well-drilled regiment of cavalry.

We stood for a minute entranced at the fine sight, then, as they cantered off, I said, " Well, boys, here's the pan at last ! "

" Yes," croaked Du Toit, " but not the Salt Pan ! "

Nor was it. The white sand which I had first seen, and taken for granted as salt, only extended round the slopes of the dunes encircling the pan, which was mainly composed of hard-baked greenish mud, covered with a glaze and as smooth as a billiard-table. Here and there lay a few pebbles of jasper and quartz similar to those found all over the north-west, but there was nothing at all approaching the " indications " we were in search of, and we had evidently stumbled upon quite a different pan from any of those described by Old Gert.

Meanwhile it was rapidly growing dark, and Du Toit very sensibly suggested that, whilst there was yet a little light, we should separate and search the pan as much as possible, to see if by great luck there might be a little water in any of the slight hollows. But nothing but a little still moist mud rewarded us, and we wearily sought a nook in the dunes and threw ourselves down to sleep. We had biltong and *roster-kook* enough, but scarcely a gill of water between the three of us, and our mouths and throats were already so parched and dry that it was difficult to sleep.

" Straight back over our spoors, as soon as it's light enough to see them," said Gert du Toit as we discussed the situation. We were a full day from water, and although in no danger, we could afford to run no risks.

In the desert the nights are often extremely cold, and before morning we were awake and shivering, and as soon as the first peep of dawn appeared we searched the vicinity for dry bush, and soon had a fire, round which we crouched till daylight. And then we did a sensible thing which, however, led to our doing an extremely stupid one. For it struck

us to climb the big dune and spy out our surroundings, instead of turning straight back before the cool of the morning had gone. The dune towered a good fifty feet above the surrounding ridges, and as we reached the top, an extraordinary panorama stretched out before us. For eastward there lay pan after pan, looking exactly like little lakes left in the sand by the receding tide, their white rims and dark blue centres showing up clearly among the surrounding wilderness of reddish dunes and grey-green scrub. At least a dozen of them were in sight, and the little clouds hanging low over the farther distance showed where numerous others were situated. On more than one large numbers of gemsbok could be seen, and the thickness of the vegetation appeared to prove that in that direction at least there would be t'samma. Our resolution to return vanished instantly. Probably these were the very pans of which we were in search, and a few hours might fill our pockets with diamonds! At any rate these pans were entirely different in appearance from the one beneath us, and the deep blue colour of several of them, and their circular shape, were very suggestive. Moreover there would probably be water!

"Wait a minute," said Du Toit, as we were making a beeline east towards them. "This is exactly how men get lost and die of thirst. Suppose we don't find water or t'samma? It will take us half a day to reach and search one or two of them, and we shall never get back! We are thirsty now, and by noon we shall be half mad. We'd better go back."

So far we had not looked in that direction at all, but as we turned reluctantly westward an even more wonderful sight met our eyes. For there, apparently but an hour or two away and slightly to the south, lay the Salt Pan, a wide expanse of snowy white, apparently a frozen lake covered with untrodden snow, and bounded on the far side by gigantic dunes. And beyond it, unmistakable in size and contour, rose the huge dune of "Aar Pan,"

whose long blue floor could be seen extending for miles beneath it.

Apparently, then, we had passed within a mile or two of the Salt Pan about noon of the previous day, though the many dunes we had climbed had given us no glimpse of it!

Anyway there it was at last, impossible to miss, and we immediately decided to make for it, for it appeared but a trifling detour from our homeward track, and we had no fear of not finding our way back that way.

Once down from the big dune, and naturally the pan was lost sight of, but we were not taking any more chances, and worked by compass. Terrible work it was too, for we found no obliging *straat* leading in the right direction, but had to toil over ridge after ridge of extremely loose, bare sand, which, as the day advanced, became so hot that the hand could scarcely be borne upon it.

The dogs were now suffering greatly, for their paws were cracked and bleeding, and they were half dead with thirst. The few bushes that had afforded them occasional shelter got farther and farther apart as we entered country where apparently rain had never fallen. This was indeed desert, nothing but bare, scorching sand, with the blackened stumps of the dead *toa* grass, and here and there a shrivelled salt-bush, alone showing that vegetation had ever existed there.

By noon we were in an extremely bad plight, our tongues and lips cracked and parched, and we were each sucking a small pebble to promote salivation. The dogs dug feebly into each tiny patch of shade from the far-apart bushes, and lay panting and whining until we were almost out of sight over the next dune, when, howling with pain from their bleeding and burning feet, they would scuttle along after and past us, frantically looking for a little shade to lessen their torture.

There seemed little hope of their getting through, and I wished to shoot the unfortunate animals,



ON THE GREAT SALT PAN, SOUTHERN KALAHARI.

Dogs dying of thirst.

but Du Toit dissuaded me, saying that there was just a chance that we should find fresh water near the Salt Pan, for he had heard the Hottentots say that in the old days, when they were allowed access to it, they had pits dug in its margin, where they got good fresh water quite near to the salt. He said he hoped also to find traces of the old waggon-road, which would help us get our bearings properly.

Still we could obtain no further glimpse of the pan, for the dunes were all of the same dead level; moreover the mirage was now dancing all round the circumscribed horizon, which ended in every direction in shimmering sheets of water, in which clouds, dunes, and occasionally gemsbok and animals were mirrored to perfection. Our feet were blistered and bleeding, and van Reenen was rapidly getting lame, but we dared not rest; moreover there was no shade, and to sit or lie on the burning sand was worse torture than staggering on.

At length the bare dunes ended abruptly, grass and bushes appeared again, and here and there Du Toit was able to pluck a tiny shoot of young sorrel to chew, which gave us some small relief from what was now torture. Then came a small *gar boom* tree, its scanty greyish leaves full of long bean-like pods on which buck feed greedily, and capable of giving us a modicum of shade. We threw ourselves down, panting and anxious. Du Toit, however, made for the first prominent dune we had seen for hours, and, climbing it, brought us the welcome news that the Salt Pan was barely a mile away. So we shuffled on again, and at three o'clock stood on its margin. It was truly a wonderful sight—circular in form, a mile or more in diameter, and covered with salt as pure and white as the driven snow. Across it, and adding to its striking resemblance to a snow-clad Canadian lake, lay the spoors of gemsbok and other large animals, the recent ones showing as black as ink, for the salt is but a few inches deep, and underlying it is a thick black mud.

Into this the poor tortured dogs dug their noses -

it was cool, but pure brine—and with their tails between their legs and howling dismally they crawled back to the sand and bush.

Meanwhile, in spite of our plight, the wide expanse of clean salt had proved as irresistible to us as a clean stretch of sea sand usually does to schoolboys or "cheap trippers," and we scraped our initials deep into the black mud, till the lettering stood out as clearly as black type upon white paper. Van Reenen wished to cool his burning feet in the wet brine, but was dissuaded, and, separating, we searched the margin of the pan for a sign of the pits spoken of by the Hottentots. But we found no vestige of them, though on the southern margin we found the old waggon-path, plainly visible owing to its thick covering of *toa* grass, but useless to us, as it led south-west towards "Aar Pan," whilst our camp and water lay north-west.

The big dune at Aar Pan loomed up temptingly; it did not appear more than an hour's walk, and remembering the thunder-clouds and apparent rainfall we had seen in that direction, we were for a moment tempted to make for it, but sanity prevailed—for to have gone there and found no water would have meant death; as we afterwards found, the distance between the Salt Pan and the water-pit there took a good four hours to negotiate.

We therefore made for the north-west edge and climbed the highest dune, whence we hoped to distinguish the big dune near our camp, but could not identify it. It was nearly sunset, we were utterly worn out and tortured with thirst, and could only talk in a whisper, but few words were necessary. We had traversed one side and the base of an elongated triangle, and to find our camp we must complete it, steering so as to cut, if possible, our spoor of the day before, and the long *straat* leading to our camp. Had we been able to rest the night and look for it by daylight, this would have been child's play, but we could not disguise the fact that we were almost at the end of our tether, and unless we did

the journey in the cool of the night we should never live through the heat of another day. It was now nearly sundown, and we realised that at any rate we could not hope to reach our old spoors before the light failed. However, we had to push on, and, marking our course very carefully, we started again.

One dog limped behind, the other poor brute lay dying, and we gave it a merciful bullet. We calculated that our camp lay about twelve miles north-east; twelve miles—a trivial distance to a pedestrian on a good road, but here in the dunes a difficult day's march, even if we could make our way to it direct, which was extremely doubtful.

One thing buoyed us up somewhat, and that was the belief that our non-arrival in camp would cause them to light a beacon-fire on the high dune, and as night fell, again and again, we were deceived by the bright stars that came up over the horizon, twinkling so brightly—even low down and directly over the dunes—in the clear atmosphere, that for a time they appeared exactly like a blazing fire.

The night was by no means dark, but even so we stumbled terribly amongst the tufts of *toa* grass, low salt-bushes, and the numerous meer-cat holes, and by ten o'clock van Reenen, whose feet were bleeding, and who was suffering worse than any of us from thirst, threw himself down and said he would go no farther. He was light-headed and raving for water, and we could do nothing to help him. So, after an anxious discussion, we decided to rest for an hour or two and slept for awhile, dreaming of cool, sparkling water. Du Toit roused me or I might be sleeping there now. My head was throbbing wildly, and my lips, tongue, and throat like the dryest of leather; indeed, it seemed as though every vital organ in me was drying up, and I felt that I should soon go mad. I could make no articulate sound till Du Toit gave me a few leaves of sorrel he had found, and which moistened my tongue somewhat. We had to kick resentment into van Reenen, who lay like a log, and who was in a very bad way.

At last he staggered up, and, drawing his hunting-knife, cut his boots off and threw them away. This discarding of clothing is a bad sign with a man suffering from thirst; many a dead man had been found in the dunes, stark naked, his boots and clothing scattered along his staggering trail. But van Reenen had simply done it on account of his bleeding, aching feet, and, in spite of thorns, got on better without them.

Thus, painfully and with frequent rests, we toiled on, till about midnight we came to a long *straat* which led the right way, and which we fondly hoped might have been the path of our outward journey. But a patient search from side to side of it showed no spoor; and now began a heart-breaking period, for we found that a whole series of these *straats* lay side by side in this direction, all of them unmarked by human footprints. Tortured and anxious, we began to doubt whether we were not out of the track altogether, and whether we had not passed it, and I remember that I at least was for making due west towards the Molopo—a good eighteen hours' trek for a strong man, and which we should never have reached. But Du Toit persisted: we could not be more than an hour or two from camp, and he would yet find the spoor. Again and again we fired our rifles and listened in vain for an answering shot, again and again we climbed the highest dunes, and gazed into the night for a fire that never shone there; now one, now the other, would fall and lie there till pulled up, but somehow we managed to struggle on a bit farther.

And at length, when despair had absolutely seized us, and van Reenen lagged behind me and I lagged behind Du Toit, I saw him again light a match and search the sand, and this time there came a hoarse cry. He had found the spoor; and revived, and with the terrible fear and anxiety lifted from us, we threw ourselves down and rested, knowing that we were saved. By daybreak our terrible thirst had conquered fatigue and we moved on again,

and within an hour our rifle-shots were answered, and our "boy," Gert Louw, was on his way to meet us with blessed, Heaven-sent nectar in the shape of a canvas bag of muddy water.

The fire had been lit, but not on the big dune.

Now, we had only been forty-eight hours away from camp and a bare thirty-six without water, yet we were nearly dead, and without a shadow of a doubt should have been dead of thirst before another sunset without water. Yet I have read of men living four or five days under like circumstances. The experience taught us several things. In future no broad, pleasant *straat* ever tempted us in the wrong direction, we carried more water, even for short trips, and took compass-bearings more accurately. Moreover we set the "boys" to work collecting dry wood, and made them stack it on the summit of the big dune, where a fire would have been seen from the Salt Pan, and where their laziness had prevented them from taking it before.

CHAPTER XVI

FORMATION OF THE DUNES AND PANS—" KOBO-KOBO " PAN—RAIN IN THE DESERT—SCORPIONS—AAR PAN—MIRAGE AND " SAND-DEVILS "—KOICHIE KA—THE PIT AND THE PUFF-ADDER.

THE long, parallel, wave-like formation of the sand-dunes of the Kalahari has been explained by many scientists as the result of the action of the prevailing wind, but this theory scarcely holds water. For though the majority of the dunes trend between west-north-west and east-south-east, this uniformity is broken in the vicinity of each of the numerous pans, around which the dunes are often formed in concentric rings, whilst the dried-up river-beds are usually flanked for some distance with dunes running parallel to their devious courses. So prominent is this concentric formation near many of the almost circular pans, that it appears probable that volcanic activity may have been the disturbing factor which formed both " pan " and dunes. Certain it is that no " prevailing wind " such as still blows, and still moves sand, would have formed either " waves " or rings as they lie to-day ; and though science may be able to refute my theory, it is that the former were formed by successive and severe earth tremors (or earth waves) passing in the same direction whilst the sand was loose and without the binding vegetation much of it bears to-day, whilst the upheaval of volcanic magma similar to that of the Kimberley mine had in many instances formed the latter.

Many ingenious theories have also been advanced as to the origin of these pans, which, although such a feature of the desert, are by no means confined to it. They are generally believed to have also been formed by the action of the prevailing wind (which

seems to have quite a lot to answer for!), and doubtless in many places, where the sand is thin, this had been the case. But it can scarcely have been the case in these numerous pans of the "Game Reserve," where the sand is at its deepest, and where many of the circular or oval pans are surrounded and protected by dunes of well over 100 feet in height, as with a wall. A learned German scientist (Passarge) has suggested that pans have been formed through vast herds of animals drinking and wallowing in the mud at these spots, causing depressions in which rain-water and sub-surface water collected, and I believe this is generally given as an explanation of the salt pans such as I have described.

But for animals to "wallow in mud" presupposes water in these spots, and they must have been free of sand in the first place to allow of water standing there.

I have visited scores of these pans, and I have found them to differ so greatly that it is hard to find a theory that would account for them all. In many the soil is what is known locally as *brak* alkaline, spongy, powdery, into which the foot sinks deep at every step; in others the surface is a hard, sun-baked mud, red in colour and covered with a shining glaze. Some are salt pans such as I have described, in others I found several feet of blue or greenish "pot clay," under which was a sort of black volcanic mud; still others were filled with a species of Kimberlite (blue ground) almost identical with that of the Premier Mine; and though the surface was often the usual blue shale that underlies most of the desert sand, in very many cases these depressions—on which the surrounding sand never accumulates—marked an entirely different "country rock" from that of the region generally.

One useful peculiarity about these pans, and one by which we were able eventually to locate them, was that their position was invariably marked by exceptionally high dunes in the immediate vicinity—usually on the south side; those of Aar Pan,

the highest in the Reserve, being a good 300 feet above the level of the pan they flank.

But to return to our own particular troubles.

Old Gert, when he had been given a very drastically edited account of our trip, was able to describe minutely how we could take our bearings from the Salt Pan to find a large pan called " Kobo-Kobo," whence the locating of our first diamond pan would be easy, and a day or two later Du Toit, Telfer, and myself made an attempt to reach it ; van Reenen, with the " boys," meanwhile testing a small pan about a mile to the north, where volcanic action was unmistakable, but where we found only pot-clay and volcanic mud.

As we had a great distance to traverse, we this time took the precaution to load ourselves well with water, each man starting with several spare bottles, which we buried at prominent spots along the route. By midday we were at the Salt Pan, which we skirted, and with a short rest pressed on, and by evening had reached the big pan, " Kobo-Kobo." It is one of the most perfect pans in the desert, as true a circle as though drawn by a compass, surmounted by extremely high dunes, and with a perfectly level, spongy, alkaline floor. In common with most of the pans, it appears to have at some time contained a large quantity of water, as the margin was covered with a miniature beach of pebbles of jasper, banded ironstone, etc., identical with the deposits found along the Orange River. On one of the dunes near it stood a solitary *wit boom*, a big tree for these parts, about 10 feet high, and in the branches of which was a Bushman's sleeping place, composed of a few sticks placed across each other, and on which they take refuge at night, when leopards or wild dogs are around and they do not wish to make a fire. It was a very old nest, however, and the bird had long since flown. Here we rested comfortably, the dry sticks making a good fire. Towards morning a cold, gusty wind got up and the morning broke with a sky completely overcast. It had threatened

rain so often that we thought nothing of it, and leaving our food, water, etc., in the tree, we set out towards the highest dunes on the farther side of the pan, from which we hoped to see the smaller one we wanted so badly. Arrived there, however, we found that this time at least the thunder-clouds were not bluffing, for rain was coming across the desert in that direction in a perfect sheet, and whilst we stood discussing plans, the first big drops began to fall amongst us.

We were totally unprepared for it, being dressed in two garments only of the thinnest khaki : it was quite useless for us to attempt to find the pan till it was over, and with one accord we turned back towards the tiny tree—the only bit of " shelter " within a day of us. By the time we were half across the pan the rain was coming down in sheets, punctuated with flashes of lightning, and the spongy surface of the pan was transformed into a quagmire in which we struggled up to our ankles. So soft did the *brak* become in a few minutes that I had serious misgivings as to whether the whole place would not dissolve into a sort of quicksand and engulf us, and I was extremely glad to be again amongst the dunes.

The rare phenomenon of heavy rain in this arid spot, where it had probably not fallen for years, was also responsible for an extraordinary sight which we witnessed as soon as we had got out of the mud on to the pebble " beach " and firm sand. Scorpions were " trekking " in all directions. Driven out of the cracks and holes in the surface of the pan by the water, they swarmed in such numbers that one could scarce walk without stepping on them, and all with tail erect, rampant, ready to sting anything that came along, or, failing that, each other or themselves. And before we got to the tree, I had killed more of them than ever I had seen, besides several tarantulas and two snakes.

" The tree will be full of them ! " shouted Telfer, and he was right. Luckily the embers were still

alive, and there was a fair amount of dry wood still, and by making a big fire we smoked and burnt them out: though through all the hours of that storm, and the whole night of dreary drizzle that succeeded it, these dangerous, venomous little pests constantly immolated themselves on the glowing embers of the fire.

It rained all day, and a *wit boom* was never intended by nature to do more than afford a modicum of shade from the sun, certainly not to keep out even a shower. Besides, this tree of ours was not much bigger than a bush, and as it was impossible to keep dry, we had to try at least to keep warm, and so the whole tree was gradually burnt piecemeal. Only a few days back we had nearly died for want of water, and now, right here in the driest part of the desert, we were getting too much of it! Each man had but a thin shirt and pants and a pith helmet, which was soon a shapeless mass of pulp. Our meal-bag had hung in the tree, and by the time we remembered the fact most of its contents had run away in thin paste. We cooked the rest and had a hot meal with the rain pouring down on us, our only anxiety being not to let the fire out. Towards evening Gert said, "I never remember a rain like this in the Kalahari! It looks like keeping on all night. Come, we must search for more wood, and if possible shoot a buck; if so we can eat all night!"

So we gathered every dead bush within a mile—luckily there were a fair amount of them—and Gert shot a gemsbok, that stood quite still and seemed quite stupefied with the rain; and all night long we kept a fire going, and sizzled buck liver and buck steaks on the embers, and ate, and shivered, and grumbled, and steamed, as the hot flames drove some of the moisture out of our dripping clothes. Of course there was no chance of sleep, and indeed we were too occupied in keeping the fire alight and killing scorpions to think of it, and we were never more thankful than when morning at length broke,

and we could see our way for an attempt to reach our diamond pan.

By noon we had found the place, a small circular pan about 100 yards in diameter, with a well-defined "wall" of tilted shale showing at the base of the dunes all round it, but alas! like us, it was full of water, and we could do nothing. The water, though freshly fallen, was almost like brine, and quite undrinkable; and altogether our cup was full!

However, about noon the weather cleared and the sun shone, and we slept for a couple of hours, and then found a new camping-place, where wood was abundant, made a big fire, and turned in for the night.

Although so much rain had fallen, it had been of no use to us, for all the pans in this particular vicinity were, we found, either salt or very alkaline, and whatever water they had caught was undrinkable. We had therefore to return to camp, there to refit for another trip, fully resolved that in future a mackintosh would be included in our equipment.

Thunder-showers now became frequent, and in some of the pans small pools of muddy but still drinkable water could be found; but this supplement to our supply of water was too precarious to be relied upon, and we were forced to still keep our base within reach of Rauchtenbach's supply.

Meanwhile we tested several pans within easy distance of the camp, but found they were not what we required, and therefore decided to make a further reconnaissance eastward, towards where Gert had found the stones.

Van Reenen and I, therefore, one morning started for Aar Pan, resolved to climb the extremely high dune there, and from it chart out the position of as many pans as we could see, and, should we find a sufficiency of water in the pits described by Gert, to remove part of our stores, etc., there, and make it the starting place for further work. Van Reenen, who had been snug in camp during our deluge at "Kobo-Kobo," would not hear of a waterproof,

and laughed so at mine that I unslung it and left it behind again. In any case rain looked out of the question, for it was one of the most incandescent days of the trip. Starting at daybreak, we found that, though the distance was not great, this direction led absolutely athwart the dunes, and progress was extremely slow and difficult. The dunes were mostly covered with thick grasses, which the recent rain had caused to sprout in an astonishing manner, and which was every whit as troublesome to traverse as loose sand. There was an abundance of game, gemsbok in small clumps of four or six, or in pairs, standing and watching us curiously till within a stone's throw; wild ostriches in flocks, and steenbok and duiker everywhere. Leopard spoor was also very prominent, and we had great hopes of getting one; but they are the most wily of beasts, and extremely hard to get at without dogs. By noon we were in full sight of the pan, and a most extraordinary sight it presented. Its perfectly level floor of light blue shale, surrounded by hills of reddish sand, gave it precisely the appearance of a lake, and for some time after I first came in sight of it, I felt confident that it was indeed full of water. Then across this flat, unruffled surface came sweeping what appeared to be a number of waterspouts, tall, perfectly defined columns, travelling rapidly. But they were not water, but sand-whorls, a common enough phenomenon in these dry regions, and known to the Boers as *zand-duivels* (sand-devils), and which, beginning with a slight whorl of sand, gather force and velocity as they travel, picking up small pebbles, sticks, leaves, and every light article that comes in their path, and bearing it aloft to a tremendous height. Here on this perfectly flat floor there was nothing to break their symmetry, and they were as well defined as the waterspouts I took them for. From the high dunes from which we first obtained a full view of the pan, the whole circuit of its flanking dunes was plainly visible, but as we descended the mirage hid these, and when we eventually stood on

the floor no sign of the far dunes could be seen: we were apparently standing on the edge of a vast unbroken lake, whose mirror-like surface reflected the clouds as faithfully as a sheet of water would have done. And when, after a few minutes, several more "waterspouts" sprang up and went sailing across the "water," I had almost to pinch myself; the whole thing was so real in its unreality. The pan is about two miles wide by five miles long, but by the time we were half-way the mirage had puzzled us so that we began to wonder if ever we should find the pits we were looking for. Occasionally a dune on the far bank loomed up as though it *might* be a solid reality, but a few steps in that direction would see it melt away, dissolving into the hazy shimmer. It was impossible to judge either distance or proportion; on several occasions a big pile of rocks came into view apparently as large as cottages and half a mile away, and, on our making for them, proved to be boulders the size of a bucket, and barely fifty yards' distance. Then a long line of gemsbok came into sight following each other at perfectly regular intervals. Suddenly they stopped as one, then they all tossed their heads together, and then the line began to waver and break up and float away, and lo! there stood a solitary old bull staring at us, quite alone—the rest had all been tricks of the mirage. When we were within thirty yards he turned and made off, and was soon up to his knees in water, apparently, and followed by several of his spectral attendants. Altogether the place seemed absolutely uncanny, and in no part of the Kalahari have I ever seen the mirage play such tricks as at Aar Pan.

We found the pits at length, a shaft of about 15 feet in depth, and a shallower one of about 6 feet, side by side, and sunk at the side of a dolerite dyke ("Aar") bisecting the Dwyka shale of the pan, and from which it takes its name. There was nearly a foot of muddy water in the shallow shaft, and a very small pool at the bottom of the other, so we

had no anxiety as to water. Indeed, after having drunk our fill from the shallow pit, we got fastidious : it was certainly very muddy and alkaline, and with at least ten mosquito larvæ to the spoonful, not to mention smaller abominations.

So van Reenen prepared to go down the deeper shaft, where a little water looked cleaner. An old tree-trunk had been left in it as a ladder, probably by natives, years before, and he swung himself over the edge, trying to reach the top of this pole. As he did so a big owl flew out, brushing past him, and nearly scaring the life out of both of us. It probably saved his life though, for looking down carefully to see if there were others, and our sun-blinded eyes getting accustomed to the gloom, we made out, just gliding lazily away from the water, a huge puff-adder, fully 4 feet long, and bloated as they always are. It was so near the colour of the dark rock that, had it not moved, we should certainly not have seen it, and van Reenen would almost assuredly have been bitten, and to have been bitten would have meant death.

The horror of that sluggish, bloated, most deadly of all snakes lurking there by that tiny pool of water, in a spot where water is so precious and certain to be sought by the rare wayfarer, and in a confined space where escape from it would be impossible, appealed to me most vividly, and we resolved that before we left the desert we would make an end of that big puff.

Meanwhile we decided that the other water was quite good enough for us. We had been walking about nine hours, and were dog-tired by the time we had climbed to the top of the enormous dune, which can be seen for so far in the Kalahari. It was nearly sunset, the mirage had disappeared, and the big pan, with a smaller one divided from it only by a narrow isthmus of dunes southward, could be seen from end to end, a distance of about eight or nine miles running almost north and south, whilst eastward a vast expanse of desert stretched to the far horizon, broken

here and there by the prominent dunes we had learnt to associate with the pans.

In all directions the vast " sandscape " was unbroken by a sign of life, and, used to the desert as we were, somehow that highest dune to which we had climbed appeared the loneliest spot in all the Kalahari, and it was quite a relief, after we had lit a fire on the very top, to see an answering flame shine out from the signal dune at the camp some fifteen miles or more away.

Though there was plenty of vegetation on the dune, there was nothing in the shape of a tree, and later we lay down back to back near the fire, for we had no blankets, and the night was chilly as the day had been hot. I woke with a soft rain coming down in dense darkness, and was already soaked through, thanks to my idiocy in again bringing no waterproof. The fire was out and the wood hopelessly wet, and after wasting half my matches in vain, I woke van Reenen up so as to have someone to swear at.

He said, " That's right—blame me! Why, you Jonah, don't you know that it's you that brings all these samples of weather we get! Wet through in the middle of the Kalahari! Why, you're the sort of man who'd get sunstroke at the North Pole!"

We walked round a bit in the drenching drizzle, but got tired of kicking through the *haak doorn* bushes and pulling out the thorns, and came back to where the fire had been, kicked the ashes away, and lay back to back again on the still warm sand.

We had seen numbers of big leopard spoors on this dune, and when, a little later, van Reenen nudged me violently in the ribs and gave a " Hist! " I listened for all I was worth. Then I heard him cock his rifle. All I could hear was a faint scratching, but whether it was a big scratch some distance away, or a small scratching close at hand, neither of us could determine. And so we lay in the drizzle and darkness, with the locks of our rifles huddled under us as much as possible, waiting and expecting any-

thing. Then suddenly van Reenen said, "Machtig! why, the damned thing is in my pocket!"

He had on a thin khaki jacket which had been hung on a bush whilst he collected firewood early in the evening, and there certainly was something scratching in the pocket. Luckily he did not put his hand in, but pulled the coat off. I struck a match and he shook the pocket carefully, and out dropped a big black scorpion, the very counterpart of the one that had stung him so badly at the beginning of the trip. Had he put his hand in that pocket . . . !

He killed it, and walked about most of the rest of the night, though he came over and woke me up once and said, "Jonah!" and I believe that to this day he blames me for that scorpion and the puff-adder.

In the morning, however, we found that there had been another visitor during the night, the wet sand showing the spoor of an exceptionally big leopard, that had evidently been circling round our bivouac most of the night, his pad covering van Reenen's footprint in several places.

From this spot we worked a few days eastward, locating a number of pans, in one of which we found extremely promising yellow ground, and we determined to bring tools, etc., to Aar Pan, and make an effort to properly test some of these places, especially as we found that more rain had fallen in this locality, and that the t'samma, which would make us independent of water, would soon be big enough to use. On this part of the trip, to enable us to cover long distances, we cut our equipment down to the very lowest: a rifle, twenty-five cartridges, knife, compass, matches, etc., and a quart water-bottle, carrying absolutely no food or cooking utensils. We used to shoot a steenbok, cook the liver and kidneys on sticks over the fire, and the head in the ashes for breakfast, and bury the legs in the embers till they were roasted dry, and sling the meat on to our belt. No bread, occasionally salt—from a pan—a big enough salt-cellar for a glutton! Occasionally we found a few tiny berries that the Bushmen eat, but mostly these are

aromatic and bitter, and as there are poisonous varieties much resembling them, we usually left them severely alone. Spiny cucumbers were also beginning to appear, mostly intensely bitter, but also eaten by the Bushmen. In this region, too, the grass was very luxuriant, and would have provided food for thousands of cattle, without deprivation to the huge flocks of gemsbok that wandered over it. Many of these wide "desert" stretches were extremely beautiful, being covered for miles with tall, thickly growing flowers, a species of campanula something like a fox-glove, growing to a height of three or four feet, and of beautiful and vivid colours of great variety. The scent of these vast parterres was faintly sweet in the day-time, but during the night it became almost overpowering, and I was told by Old Gert that Bushmen have a great objection to sleeping among them, believing that to do so means never to wake.

During the whole of our trip, so far, since we had left the border and entered the Reserve, we had seen no human being, nor even a spoor, but on the edge of one of these eastern pans we now discovered the remains of a recent Bushman camp, the small shelters of interwoven branches being simply constructed to afford a little shade during the hottest part of the day. They had apparently been gone only a day or two, trekking eastward, and the remains of full-grown t'samma showed that the fruit was already to be found in that direction. The little desert Ishmaels had probably seen our fires, and scented the presence of the white man, as I put it to van Reenen. He looked me up and down and said, "Well, yes! the wind's been blowing from our direction!"

It is quite true that you cannot have many baths out of a quart of water a day, but I think he might have put it differently.

After about a week of this we trekked back to our camp, where we revelled in *roster-kook* and coffee and sugar, and compared notes with Telfer,

who had tested several more pans north, as far as possible, without water. We had expected a Scotch cart with our next load of water, and the idea was to endeavour to get the oxen over as far as Aar Pan with a light load of stores, tools, etc.; but the waggon turned up without the smaller vehicle, and van Reenen and I decided to go back again, with as much as we could carry, and try to locate a big pan known by the Bushman name of "Koichie Ka," near which was one of the pans where several diamonds had been picked up, whilst Telfer and Du Toit would come on with the cart a week later.

I shall describe this trip somewhat in detail, as it was typical of what happened almost daily afterwards. We carried almost 60 lb., each taking flour, coffee, tools, etc., and made very heavy going of it to Aar Pan, where we made for a *wit-boom* tree we had discovered on the top of one of the big dunes, and worked till late cutting branches, and making a sort of shelter to which we added our waterproof sheets—for this time we came prepared for rain, and we got it. By ten at night it was coming down in sheets, and a terrific thunderstorm burst over us, keeping us busy till daylight trying to keep the water out and the fire in, and being pestered the whole time by van Reenen's pet aversion, scorpions. This continued well into the following morning, when, as soon as it somewhat lifted, we made a cache of our stores in the tree, and started towards the far-distant pan Koichie Ka. About noon the sun came out, and the whole desert steamed. We passed for hours through nothing but miles of the beautiful flowers I have described, and then came to a patch of broken dunes where the vegetation was scantier, and where we saw more snakes in an hour than I had ever seen before. Presumably the rain had disturbed them, and they were now drying themselves; at any rate, there they were, almost at every step, principally big yellow and brown cobras; but one very striking and, to me, entirely new variety was a very light yellow chap with round spots of a brilliant

scarlet speckled over him, exactly like spots of blood. They were in every good-sized bush, in the meer-cat burrows that honeycombed the hollows, coiled round the tufts of *toa* grass—in fact, they swarmed.

We had hoped to reach the big pan by nightfall, as there was a big krantz there where we could shelter; but it became evident that we could not do so, and we turned aside towards a small pan where a few bushes gave promise of a fire at least, for it became evident that we were in for rain again.

This rain was becoming monotonous, it seemed to follow us about, and the annoying part of it was that it did not relieve our anxiety as to water to any appreciable extent: no matter how it poured, the whole rainfall sank immediately into the sand or, where it was caught in a pan, became undrinkable brine almost immediately.

Moreover it meant that, to rest at all, we had to encroach on the precious hours of daylight, to say nothing of lying on the damp sand. And after another miserable and rainy night, I found to my consternation that I was in for a bout of fever, here, a day's march from our few stores at Aar Pan even, and quite two from the camp! We started on again as soon as possible, for I argued that, if I was going to be ill, a krantz such as we expected to find at Koichie Ka would be a better place to lie up in than the dunes—more home-like, as it were. Van Reenen was all right, but unfortunately one of his shoes went wrong through being soaked, and soon the sole began to part company with the upper. And he had left his *voorslaag* at Aar Pan. Luckily I had some fancy native wire-work in my belt which, unravelled, served to keep sole and upper together, but neither of us was doing Marathon time that day. We found the pan about midday: one of the largest, almost a perfect circle, and with the krantz as Old Gert had described it. This rocky krantz we found to consist of deep red and yellow sandstone, apparently belonging to the Zwartmodder series. It flanked the northern edge of the pan, rising abruptly

some 60 feet, and was capped with concretionary limestone, which also covered the dunes behind it. It was honeycombed with caves, and there was evidence that it had swarmed with baboons, whose absence was probably accounted for by the fact that a pair of big leopards and their cubs were its present occupants. Their spoors showed that they were "at home," and later we lighted a big fire and tried to smoke them out, besides firing a few shots into their cave; but luckily they did not respond to the invitation.

After a few hours' rest and some quinine I felt better, but water was getting a pressing matter now, for though the pan was soft mud all over, we could find none, and our flasks were empty. At last we found a little liquid mud, so full of lime that it curdled into a sort of "curds and whey" when we tried to boil it. However, van Reenen shot a duiker, and we stewed some of its flesh in this semi-liquid, and made a sort of broth which appeased both hunger and thirst, and saved our little remaining water.

As no more could be found, however, and I was still groggy with fever and van Reenen had gone lame, we decided to get back to Aar Pan, if we could, and leave further exploration for a later day. So, after a night in the rocks, we turned back, taking the last of the liquid mud in our bottles, and chewing sorrel and other grasses to allay our thirst. The journey back was painful to a degree; we could only go slowly, and as nightfall found us still a long way off Aar Pan and water, we struggled on most of the night by compass and the stars.

Then we slept an hour or so, but were too anxious to sleep much, and were wide awake before sunrise, waiting for daylight to show us if we had kept the path. Luckily we had, and soon were climbing the big dune at Aar Pan which separated us from water. Suddenly van Reenen stopped and pointed. "Camels!" he said.

There were two of them, hobbled, feeding close

to us, and at our tree we found quite a party—two police troopers, Telfer, and several "boys."

The police had been sent from Witdraai, their post on the Kuruman River, to examine our permits, and their coming was extremely welcome. Their big shambling mounts carry a big load, besides the rider, with ease, and their saddle-bags were full of all kinds of luxuries. Soon we were feasting on coffee and *real* bread and tinned salmon, and began to realise that there was something in civilisation after all.

After a few hours they left us to patrol towards Tilrey Pan, through a country unknown to them, and with them went Telfer, who hoped thus to be enabled to reach a far-distant pan which Old Gert called "Wolverdanse" (Wolf's Dance), where lay the green stones thought to be emeralds, and which we feared we should never reach on foot.

The patrol dropped him a few miles away from us about a week later. He had not succeeded in finding the emeralds, but he had a finer collection of bruises and blisters from sitting on and falling off the camels than he ever possessed before.

Meanwhile we thoroughly explored Aar Pan and several small pans near, finding more Kimberlite, but being handicapped by the utter impossibility of washing the ground. Our food ran short, and we had a very rough time; but at length our cart turned up with food and tools, and the first post we had had since leaving Upington. The newspapers contained the news of Scott's death, and the story of his heroism and sufferings made us feel ashamed of having grumbled at our own few privations.

Unfortunately, the water in the small pit had now shrunk to a few bucketfuls of bad-smelling liquid, so full of insects as to be almost undrinkable; and as no rain fell in the pan, and t'samma was not yet available, we had to make up our minds to abandon the camp, and make an attempt to establish a new water-base somewhere along the Kuruman River

till t'samma gave us a better opportunity of reaching the farthest pans.

We therefore filled our bottles, gave the oxen the rest of the liquid mud, and trekked due west, having first sent a " boy " to the main camp to warn the water-waggon to take back our belongings there.

Before leaving, van Reenen made up his mind to shoot the big puff that lay in the deepest shaft beside the little pool of water which we had not touched—for we feared that some day a passer-by might see the water and not the snake, and scramble down to his death. So van Reenen lay peering down the shaft for an hour, till at last the big brute glided out of his hole to the water, and a bullet cut him nearly in two.

" He's finished, anyway," said my pal, and so he was ; but that puff-adder was yet to revenge himself on me in a very decided manner.

We trekked all day through a magnificent grass country, the dunes being almost waist-high in it, and I could understand the bitter complaints of some of the border farmers that the gemsbok are given the best part of the country.

We reached a well in the Molopo the following morning, and at a border farm near we obtained horses, and rode up to Witdraai, the nearest police post on the Kuruman River, to get information as to the prospects of t'samma, etc., eastward of that place.

CHAPTER XVII

THE KURUMAN RIVER—WITDRAAI—AAR PAN AND EASTWARD—GEMSBOK AND T'SAMMA—DRIELING PAN—WILD DOGS—THIRSTY CAMELS—SEARCH FOR WOLVERDANSE—"NABA"!—BUSHMEN—END OF THE TRIP.

THE old bed of the Molopo River, which farther south has been long since denuded of timber, is, in the vicinity of its junction with the Kuruman, both well wooded and interesting. Long, park-like stretches of grass with fine trees of a variety of *cameel-doorn*, having huge, bean-like pods, delighted the eye tired of sand and the monotony of the treeless dunes we had just left, and when we eventually turned into the Kuruman River the vegetation became even *more* luxuriant.

Not only the dry and sand-choked bed of this once important river, but for miles on either side of it, was a vast field of luxuriant grass almost waist-high, and as thick as a corn-field; indeed, this portion of the Kalahari, and for a long distance into the Reserve towards Kuruman, would form an ideal ranching country.

In the fine trees were birds in great variety, hornbills with huge grotesque beaks, and a most lovely blue jay with a plumage of the most brilliant Oxford and Cambridge blues, small scarlet finches, and a number of others less conspicuous.

In many a little glade along this delightful oasis we saw *paauw* in flocks of twenty or more, stalking about just like turkeys, and, given water—which is never wanting if sunk for—there are few pleasanter places than this ancient river-bed. A feature of the landscape was the extraordinary number of dead, bare trees still standing, and showing that the water, which sinks deeper in the sand every year,

no longer reaches their roots. Many of these trees were loaded with the huge nests of the small "social bird," which builds in colonies of hundreds, constructing nests the size of haystacks, and which often accumulate to such a size that the huge branch on which they rest breaks with the weight.

Witdraai consisted then of three small native huts used as store, living, and sleeping rooms by the trio of camel police stationed there, and which were comfortable in comparison with the cave in the limestone of the river-bank which was their only "home" for some months when they were first sent to establish a post at this out-of-the-way spot in the desert. However, remote as was the post, it compared very favourably with the other few stations along the German South-West border. For here was water in plenty, a borehole sunk deep in the Kuruman River giving them a never-failing supply; moreover they had trees, grass, flowers, and birds, and a long oasis stretching for over a hundred miles towards Kuruman in which to forget the desert.

They had been greatly pestered by troops of wild dogs, which had on several occasions broken into their kraal and killed and maimed numbers of their sheep and goats.

As there were Bushmen near the camp at Witdraai, we endeavoured to arrange a dance for the benefit of the bioscope camera, but the spokesman of the tribe, when he saw the machine, incontinently bolted, and we could not get in touch with him again. So far the camera had been of little use, as it had proved far too heavy to take on the more distant trips, and we had found it impossible to get it near to big game in the desert on account of the want of cover.

Whilst at Witdraai I succeeded in killing a snake which I had seen once or twice in the vicinity, and which I believe to be a new variety, as I have not seen it described in any book, or a specimen in any museum.

Old Gert called it a *blaauw slang* (blue snake),

and said it was peculiar to the Kalahari, and that in killing it I must hit it hard, as it was very tough and difficult to kill. The specimen I at length obtained was about 6 feet long, and of a light blue colour along its back and reddish underneath. It was apparently a variety of cobra, as it extended its hood and struck viciously when I tackled it, and I found that Gert had been right, for the light stick I picked up made very little impression on it, and I had to finish it with my rifle-butt.

For some reason I could never get the Hottentots or Bastards to skin a snake. Several of our "boys" were expert hands at "braying" a skin, and steenbok, duiker, jackal, lynx, leopard, or in fact any animals we killed, were soon converted into beautifully soft furs, but when it came to a snake I had to do it myself.

At the end of a few days of this pleasant break in desert life a Bushman messenger whom we had sent out brought the news that he had found a patch of mature t'samma between Aar Pan and a small pan called "Koma," where the indications were promising; and as this meant that oxen could remain in the desert, and we should be independent of water, we hastened back southward to the waggon and re-entered the Reserve. We also took a light Scotch cart, with which, from this new base, we hoped to be able to make a flying trip eastward with sufficient tools to test some of the pans properly.

About a day's trek into the desert we found the t'samma, a patch of about a morgen where a vagrant thunderstorm had fallen in season, and in which the little juicy insipid melons were just about the right size—that of a cricket-ball.

On them we lived, quite independent of water, eating them raw, or leaving them in the ashes overnight—in which case they are full of a clear liquid by morning. Coffee can be made or cooking carried out with this, but though life can be sustained for an indefinite period upon this substitute, the craving for water is always present. Unfortunately, this

t'samma did not obviate the real difficulty of testing the ground, for which an abundance of water was needed, and after a few days Du Toit and myself, leaving the rest of the party, inspanned six oxen in the Scotch cart and started eastward. We had with us a Bastard named John Louw, who knew the desert in that part better than most men, and believed that with moderate luck we should be able to trek from pan to pan with a fair amount of tools, etc., where hitherto we had barely been able to reach as we stood.

Crossing the huge dunes at Aar Pan with a cart was a fair criterion of what we should be able to do, and by the following evening, so well had the oxen pulled, that we stood at the big krantz at Koichie Ka pan, where van Reenen and I had had such a rough time a few weeks previously. There was no mud in the pan now, however, much less water, but John, who took the oxen farther east to feed, brought back some t'samma and said there was plenty in that direction. So our minds were at ease and we had quite a jolly evening under the krantz, where the leopards still resided, for traces of fresh "kills" were everywhere. However, we had a roaring fire, and I slept like a top by it till Gert woke me at daybreak to witness a sight I would not have missed for anything. The whole pan was covered with gemsbok, many hundreds of them, straggling at first, but eventually bunching into a herd that suddenly thundered across the pan like a regiment of charging cavalry, and disappeared over the dunes westward. I was delighted at the spectacle, but both Gert and the Bastard looked anxious.

"If the t'samma east is not a very big patch," said Du Toit, "we shall find that what they have not eaten they have trampled to bits!"

The oxen had been brought in and had slept in their yokes all night, to prevent their straying, and we lost no time in getting under way. Unfortunately, Gert's prognostications had been correct, for we found

the whole width of the t'samma zone trampled for miles, and most of the few remaining t'samma smashed and spoiled. However, the oxen were able to get a feed that would keep them for a day or so, and as we expected to find more, we pushed on.

During the three days that followed we had a most anxious and wearying time, reaching several pans where excellent Kimberlite was obtained within a foot or so of the surface, but being constantly worried and baffled by the absence of water to wash it, or t'samma for ourselves and the oxen.

We were now in the heart of the desert, three long days' trek from our waggon and t'samma patch, and simply living from hand to mouth on the few t'samma we found here and there ; and, realising that we were risking rather too much, we made up our minds to return before the oxen had begun to suffer from thirst.

There was a small portion of the big t'samma patch that the gemsbok had spoiled which had escaped with slighter damage, and as the little melon grows rapidly, we hoped to find refreshment at this spot ; but our bad luck held, for a troop of big baboons cleared out of it as we drew near, and we found that the destructive brutes had torn up and smashed most of those they had not eaten, and so both man and beast had to be content with very short commons.

By the time we reached the vicinity of Aar Pan we were suffering rather badly ; each stray melon we found had to go to the oxen, and it appeared doubtful whether we should be able to get them out with the cart. Most of the heavier samples were thrown away to lighten the load, but even so they could scarcely be got to drag the cart, and when we got to the huge dunes at Aar Pan we could get them no farther.

We had seen thunder-showers falling in this direction, and had hoped that there might be water in the pits again, so Du Toit and myself took a billy-can and some cord and hastened across the dunes, leaving John to watch the exhausted cattle.

I said to Du Toit, " In any case there is bound to be a little in the deep pit, enough for us ! Animals can't reach it there."

" But the puff-adder ! Did van Reenen kill it outright ?"

" The bullet cut it nearly in half. It would be sure to get into its hole in the rock to die ! "

Du Toit thought otherwise. " If it could crawl at all it would go to the water—and if it died in it, the water will be *giftig* (poisonous)."

I stuck to the opinion that the snake would have died in its hole—the wish being father to the thought —for I was half dead with thirst. But it needed no canful of water to show that I was wrong, for the stench that rose from that pit was too awful for words, and I could not face it long enough even to peer down. But Gert told me that the bloated body of the big snake lay almost wholly in the water, of which, by a strange irony of fate, there was quite a large pool in the pit, enough, had it been drinkable, to have satisfied not only ourselves, but the oxen. So that the puff-adder had a grim revenge for van Reenen's bullet. There was no water whatever in the other pit, and there was nothing to do but to struggle through to the waggon, which we did by abandoning the cart and with the loss of two of the oxen *en route*.

We found t'samma there almost exhausted, and a day or two afterwards were forced to retreat again to the Molopo.

Here, after revelling a day or two in good water, we separated, van Reenen and Telfer to enter the Reserve still farther south, whilst I made an attempt to reach the far north-eastern pan known as " Wolverdanse," where emeralds were supposed to exist, and which Telfer had searched for in vain. From the heights of a pan known as " Kei Koorabie," which we had reached on our last trip, John the Bastard had pointed out this " emerald pan " on the far horizon to the north, a long blue ridge of a very distinctive shape ; but we had realised that the only



TEACHING CAMELS TO EAT TSAMMA.



BUSHMAN AT BOOMPLAATS, SOUTHERN KALAHARI.
With native musical instrument.

way to reach it was by striking south from the Kuruman River.

I had therefore arranged with a camel police trooper, when on his next patrol in that direction, to give me a lift as far as Tilrey Pan, which is the extreme eastern limit of the patrol, and which is very rarely visited even by them.

The meeting-place was to be at a small group of pans known as " Drieling Pannen " (Triplet Pans), a few hours' journey east of the Molopo and south of the Kuruman, but where I had never been. I was told to bring nothing but what I stood in, not even a rifle; but this latter stipulation I did not carry out, as I could not quite risk ten days in the desert without it, and before the camels reached me I had come to be thankful I had brought it! I left Molopo at a spot called Lentland's Pan one Sunday afternoon, alone, finding myself in an abundant grass country, through which an old waggon track still showed, though no vehicle appeared to have passed there for years, and by sunset had reached what I supposed to be the pan; but naturally there was no one to ask, and I had an uncomfortable feeling that the road had misled me, and that I might be at the wrong spot. The pan was small and was literally covered with a big flock of *paauw*, which cleared at my approach. There was mud enough, but no water, and I foresaw a thirsty walk back should it be the wrong spot and the camels fail to turn up.

I found that there was a big pack of wild hunting-dogs in the vicinity, for their fresh spoor lay everywhere, and I was glad I had brought the rifle. Somehow the conviction gained upon me that I was in the wrong place, and as night was approaching, I set about making a small *scherm* and gathering wood for a fire. There was very little near the pan, but on the crest of some high dunes near I saw some big dead stumps, and as I should need a fire all night, I went to try and get them. The biggest one was very firmly rooted, and in my efforts to uproot it, I fell and sprained my ankle so severely that I was

hard put to it to get back to the *scherm*. I immediately realised that, should this prove to be the wrong rendezvous, I would be in rather a serious predicament. I had only a little water and a piece of biltong, and although I had walked from the Molopo in an afternoon, it would take me two days to drag myself out with a badly-sprained ankle.

The sun was setting, and there was no sign of the camels, but as I looked across the pan, I saw a dog come down over the dune to the edge of it.

"Hooray!" I said to myself. "Police dog." And I whistled to it, expecting the camels to be just behind it. It stood looking at me from about a distance of a hundred yards, a tall brindled thing almost the size of a mastiff, but with a queer long neck, and as I looked others followed it till nine of them stood there looking at me—a pack of wild dogs. If ever man was thankful for a rifle it was I, at that moment, for though they seldom attack an armed man, they seem to have an uncanny sense which tells them when a man is maimed or without weapons, and have torn many a helpless traveller to pieces.

I fired a shot at them immediately, and they made off for a time, but by dark they were back again, apparently with reinforcements. I had only a tiny fire which would certainly not last all night, and altogether I did not exactly fancy my chances. However, an occasional shot kept them from rushing me, and about eleven o'clock, just as the moon rose and I could see them plainly, to my intense relief a rifle-shot answered my own, and my friend the trooper and his Bushman with two camels came upon the scene, and the dogs vanished.

Next day we turned eastward, passing a number of pans I had not seen, and entering a region where t'samma was now abundant. Here the dunes were so steep and high that they resembled huge walls of sand set close together, and crossing them on camel-back was a thing to be remembered. The camel is a bad climber, and after tediously toiling up the steep slopes diagonally, and with a gait like a mule

with the staggers, my mount would make up for it by taking giant plunging strides down the other side at a frantic pace, each one of which would threaten to throw me over the next dune, like a stone from a sling. It is not only the great height of the perch on a camel's back that causes such a feeling of insecurity, but rather the want of a sturdy crest like that of a horse in front of one to cling to in case of need. With the camel the place of the maned crest is taken by an aching void, a deep gap falling away from the pommel, on the far side of which, and at a great distance, rises the long, sinuous neck, apparently quite detached from the animal you are riding on, and the thin reins, made fast to little pegs in the nostril, have to be used so lightly that it is no uncommon occurrence for the camel to turn his supercilious face right round and gaze into your own, emitting a veritable "breath of the tombs" into your face as he does so.

Altogether camel-riding in the dunes is a queer experience: at the same time it enables one to be free of the haunting anxiety of thirst, and to reach spots otherwise unapproachable. Unfortunately, my mount met with a misadventure when but two days out, as in trotting along a narrow *straat* between the dunes, which were here waist-deep in magnificent grasses, he put his foot into a hidden ant-bear hole and came down, throwing me almost out of the Kalahari. Luckily—in a way—he was too lame to run away, and when I succeeded in getting my head out of the sand he was still there. As the other camel was several dunes ahead, my friend the trooper saw nothing of my having dismounted, and kept on; so that I had to walk the whole day and lead the lame camel, who groaned and grunted in a most astonishing manner the whole time. To enable the animal to rest and replenish our water-tanks we turned towards a place in the Kuruman River known as "Visch-gat" (Fish-hole), where there was usually water, but in this case our luck was dead out. The pit was about 20 feet deep, sunk in hard

shale, and there was plenty of water, but it was quite putrid and undrinkable even for the camels. A bucketful that I drew was full of the decomposed fragments of small birds—bones, feathers, etc.—and there were a number of them still fluttering around the surface of the water, apparently too stupid to fly straight up and regain the open air. A contributory cause to this phenomenon may have been the owl that sat in a little niche about half-way down, screwing his head round and blinking up at us as we peered down. We had to stay here three days till the camel was fit to carry me again, and as time hung very heavily on our hands, we rigged up a wire noose on the end of a branch and fished for the owl in turns, making bets as to the time it took to hook him and haul him out. Each time we succeeded, he flew wildly round in the glaring sun for a minute, and came right back to the pit.

There were traces of Bushmen in the vicinity, and it transpired there were ladies amongst them, with the result that our police-boy was always stealing away, and had to be remonstrated with in the usual manner. Two days later, when we were deep in the dunes near Tilrey Pan, he retaliated by deserting, and leaving us to tend the camels ourselves.

This region was a vast grass-field, in which gemsbok swarmed in numbers incredible, troops of five and six hundred together being met with every day. Ostriches were also very abundant, but the short-legged variety which I had heard rumours of as existing in this part of the country was conspicuous by its absence. None of the pans contained any water, though many of them were still full of wet mud, stirred and trampled up by the herds of gemsbok, who appear to have a great partiality for the cool mud, though it is doubtful if they ever drink. I also noticed in this country that the duiker—which was also extremely abundant—appeared to be a much larger variety than usual, beside being of a bright rufous colour, and the female as well as the male being horned.

There were signs of the destruction caused by the extremely numerous feræ: half-eaten bodies of the smaller buck, and also of young gemsbok, being found in great abundance amongst the dunes. On several occasions we came across tiny gemsbok kids, apparently only a week or two old, lying in the dunes at some distance from the old ones, but, although so young, capable of travelling at a great pace.

We were soon short of water, but as t'samma was now abundant, we were not worried on our own account. Unfortunately, however, the camels were recent importations from Arabia, and unused to them, and at the end of a week they were beginning to feel the thirst. As we had seen rain falling south of us, we turned in that direction, and one evening came into dunes where the vegetation was still drenched with heavy rain. Here, to our joy, we at length found an open space with a small pan full of water. The camels grunted and chuckled, and shuffled towards it eagerly, and we promised ourselves a good long drink, and plenty of coffee, and a bath! We got the last, but not the others.

The water, freshly fallen as it was, was salt as brine and of a horribly putrid taste, and quite undrinkable even for the camels.

We were a long way from any other water, and it began to look serious, for they would not touch the t'samma. At length, however, we hit upon a plan which kept them alive and allowed us to search a little longer. Making them "koos" (kneel, which they are taught to do at the word of command), we cut up a big waterproof sheetful of the melons, crushed them into a pulp, and actually ladled it into their mouths; and once having got a taste of it, we found they would eat it when prepared in this manner, though these particular camels would never touch the fruit as it grew.

But, search as we would, "Wolverdanse," the pan of the "bright green stones," eluded us. Pans in the vicinity were many, and the peculiarly shaped

dune we had seen from the far south was not recognisable from these new aspects.

My good friend the trooper had also to return within a certain period, and so we had at length reluctantly to turn towards Aar Pan, where I was to be dropped to find my way south to rejoin my comrades.

As the camels, as yet unused to their new substitute for water, were still suffering from thirst, we trekked through the night as we neared the big pan, for I was now on ground I knew, and able to steer an accurate course. Crossing the pan in the dark, we found no rain had fallen there, and we off-saddled in the western dunes, anxious for the morning to get on again, for the camels were now in a bad plight, and had still a long day's journey before them before they could drink. Usually they were hobbled with huge straps and chains before letting them loose to graze, but this night my friend said, "Let 'em loose to-night; they're too tired to go far." We slept like logs, and in the morning the camels had gone! We made tracks for the highest dune—no sign of them. Then we separated and made for two other dunes. Still no sign. At last we circled to cut the spoors, and found they led north. After an hour's running and walking, and with the spoor still making north, we stopped for breath.

I said, "They're making for Witdraai!"

He said, "Not they. They're making for Arabia!"

At last, when I had given up all hope of catching them south of the Equator, the spoor turned off at right-angles, and after a few more dunes, turned directly back towards the camping-place of last night, where we found them quietly feeding within a hundred yards of their saddles, just hidden from our sleeping-place by a small dune.

A few hours from Aar Pan my good Samaritan dropped me, and turned towards his camp with the two camels, having done everything in his power to help me, and acting the man and the sportsman in every way.



THE HUGE NESTS OF THE "SOCIAL BIRDS."

These birds, although only the size of sparrows, build in colonies, and the resultant nests are often so huge that the limbs break with their weight.

I was more than sorry to lose his cheery company, and toiled on through the terrible loneliness of the dunes, feeling rather down in the mouth. I had about six hours' walk before me, and knew the route, and there was no hurry, so, finding a few t'samma, I sat down and ate some and chewed a bit of biltong. Now, for a long time I had been on the lookout for a variety of "truffle" which grows in the Kalahari after rain, and which not only the Bushmen eat, but which white people esteem a great delicacy. It is called by the Bushmen name *naba*, and though I had never seen it, I had often had it described to me. It does not appear above ground at all, but is detected by a slight swelling and cracking of the soil under which it is growing. Enthusiastic friends had told me that it was not only a true truffle, but that it knocked spots off anything ever produced in Perigord. Well, as I sat in the dunes munching t'samma and biltong of the consistency of an old boot, and thinking of all the nice things I would have when once I got into a town again, I noticed that the earth quite close to me had several of these little, gentle swellings, and, scraping away the sand, I found about half a dozen little fungi about the size of a small potato—which could be nothing but *naba*. I had no means of cooking them then, and put them in my haversack, resolving to test them the moment I reached a frying-pan. However, about an hour later, still trudging along, I took one out to have a better look at it. It certainly smelt nice, just like a young, fresh button mushroom. Perhaps it would be nice raw? I nibbled a bit—it was! So I ate it, and two others followed. . . . I got no farther, for quite suddenly the dunes began to spin round, a deadly nausea seized me, and I realised that I had been poisoned. There was nothing to be done—I could not even find a t'samma to eat, and within a few yards the Kalahari seemed to get up and smite me violently, and down I went, the whole universe swaying round me in a most unpleasant manner.

However, after about an hour of excitement I

got the better of it, and was able to walk again, though I felt like a chewed rag, and did not get out of the desert and into the old Molopo till well after dark. I have tasted *naba* since then, and enjoyed it—but cooked!

Turning south, I plodded on till about nine, when a tiny glimmer told me that I was again in the vicinity of human beings. It proved to be a canvas *huis* about 10 feet square, in which were living two white men, a woman, and several children. They were smoking and drinking coffee when I turned up out of the desert half dead with fatigue, but they made no offer of the coffee (usually proffered even by the least hospitable in these lonely regions), and I had to ask for water twice before I got a cup of even that. They wanted to know whether I had found diamonds, however, but feeling hipped at their boorishness, I said "Good night" and walked about another hour, when I struck a tiny border farm called "Wit Puts," belonging to a Boer named Engelbrecht, where I found an elderly man and a youth still awake and reading the Bible aloud. Here I was given a very kind reception, plenty of real bread and warm milk, and for the first time for months slept under a roof.

I could get no horse, however, and the next day had to walk on to Witkop, a distance of nearly thirty miles, to rejoin my companions, who, I heard, were anxiously awaiting me, as I was some days overdue. I did not get in till almost midnight, thoroughly knocked up.

Our time was now getting short, and we had still a great desire to reach a pan in the southern portion of the Reserve, where several diamonds had been picked up, so after a bare breathing-space, we again turned into the desert at a place called "Zwart Puts," this time with a strong Scotch cart and eight oxen, and two Bastards who knew the district. Two days' trek eastward we struck both t'samma in abundance, and most steep and difficult dunes, amongst which we came upon a small tribe of

Bushmen, who had not time to get out of our way. Their tiny shelters of branches were extremely rudimentary, mere windbreaks without roof, and they had seen no water for over eight weeks, living entirely upon the abundant t'samma, roasting it for water, mixing its pulp with the blood of animals as a tit-bit, grinding the dried pips between two stones and making a most palatable meal of them, or parching them in the fire first, and making a beverage not unlike coffee. With the exception of a very highly prized and badly battered old oil-can, their utensils were all of earthenware made by themselves, their arrow-heads were of chipped flint and agate, and their t'samma knives of the hard, ivory-like shin-bone of the ostrich.

They had digging-sticks of fire-hardened wood, near the point of which was fixed the *kiwe*, a heavy, rounded, perforated stone, of which I had often seen specimens in museums, and had myself found in shell-middens along the beach near Cape Voltas, but had never before seen in actual use.

The men spent a good deal of their time in hunting, which they did principally by pursuing the quarry—jackal, wild-cat, and especially the *rooi kat* (lynx)—till they got it surrounded or "cornered," and killing it with knobkerries. They "bray" these skins to perfection, using the fat of the animal, and rubbing and working it into the hide till it becomes as soft as silk. These skins they bartered eagerly for tobacco or coffee, for either of which they have an inordinate liking. They are the most omniverous of beings, for not only do they eat the flesh of every animal they kill, cats, jackals, and baboons not excepted, but lizards, locusts, ants' eggs, larvæ, and carrion and insects of the most loathsome description.

I have already referred to their stone implements, etc., and indeed so little was metal of any kind used by them that they might be classed as a survival of the Palæolithic Age.

Except for our meeting with these primitive sons of the desert, this latter part of our trip in the

Kalahari was tame and uninteresting. T'samma was plentiful, and we moved from pan to pan in comparative comfort, finding several spots where a species of Kimberlite was exposed directly beneath the superficial mud or sand of the surface, and at least one incontestable "pipe," where the "blue ground" was almost identical with that of the "Premier Mine." But we were never able to obtain water for the proper testing of these possibly rich mines, and before we left the Reserve had arrived at the conclusion that, if ever such a test was made, the first step towards it would have to be the opening of a water-route. This would entail no very great expense, as there are numerous places in the desert where water undoubtedly exists at no very great depth below the surface, and a series of boreholes would be almost certain to produce a plentiful supply. Indeed, these Kimberlite occurrences, either pipes or fissures, would themselves provide the likeliest place for such boring, as it has long been a recognised fact that shafts sunk in them rarely fail to obtain satisfactory supplies. Up to the very last day in the desert we had strong hopes of being able to bring out diamonds wherewith to prove that ours had been no wild-goose chase, but unfortunately this luck was denied us. At the same time, so good were the samples of Kimberlite we had obtained in more than one spot, and so convincing our photographs and other data as to these spots being undoubted pipes, that we considered our "proof" as required by the Government amply sufficient to allow us further facilities; and with the knowledge that finances would be readily forthcoming for the opening up of a water-route such as we intended suggesting, we came out of the Reserve at the end of our time considering that we were made men. We were ragged, burnt to the colour and consistency of biltong, our boots patched and cobbled with *voorslag* past all reasonable belief, half our teeth gone through living on t'samma (its worst effect), and altogether as desperate-looking a gang of tramps as ever graced

the north-west border; but we were happy, for there was going to be an end of poverty—we had found the pipes!

Moreover we had thousands of feet of entirely novel bioscope films—the Great Falls of the Orange, the actual pans in the heart of the desert, Bushmen hunting, dancing, preparing t'samma; the huge nests of the "social bird" with their swarming inhabitants: in short, enough new "pictures" alone to repay us for the trip, even without the diamonds. For not one of the party was pessimistic enough to imagine for a moment either that the Government would refuse to allow us a chance of opening up a water-route to the pipes, or that the intense heat of the desert had—in spite of all precautions—utterly spoilt every foot of our films.

CHAPTER XVIII

TRIP IN SEARCH OF "EMERALD VALLEY"—FEVER AND FAILURE—BACK TO GORDONIA—SECOND TRIP TO BAK RIVER—"SOME GUN!"—THE PACK-COW—SURLY NATIVES—"ROUGHING IT."

One of our greatest disappointments in the Kalahari had been our failure to reach the pan of "bright green stones," which we believed to be emeralds, and when on my return to Cape Town I found a man awaiting me who claimed to have found a rich deposit of them in Portuguese East Africa, I decided to fill in the time of waiting the Government's decision as to my desert discoveries by making a dash for "Emerald Valley."

Rumour as to the existence of this valley has for many years been current amongst prospectors and mining men in the Barberton district, and many a man has heard the tale in Johannesburg. It is alleged that a party of Boers, hunting on the Portuguese side of the Lebombo Mountains, which form the boundary between Portuguese territory and the North-Eastern Transvaal, came upon some ancient workings which they failed to penetrate, owing to noxious gas; but that at the mouth of one they found skeletons, and with the bones a small skin bag full of rough emeralds. They got away with the stones, which fetched a large sum in Europe, but for some unexplained reason were never able to reach the spot again.

My merchant, who had a small rough emerald to help his tale, claimed to have found the spot again, and wanted to make a dash for it from the Transvaal side of the Sabi Game Reserve; but as it was in Portuguese territory, I would only undertake the trip with a proper licence from the Portuguese.

As the upshot of negotiations, within a month of leaving the desert I was on my way to Delagoa Bay, accompanied by Telfer, another white miner from Johannesburg, and the " discoverer." We had been prepared for a certain amount of delay, as all must expect in dealing with Portuguese officials, but it was only after three most exasperating months of expense and waiting that we eventually crossed the Incomati River, a fully equipped expedition, armed with a " Special Mining Licence " and all the necessary permits for carrying out our purpose. And two months later three of us staggered out of the swamps more dead than alive, the fourth, the " discoverer," having utterly failed us early in the search, and having made his way back into British territory after a terrific carousal, and when he found there would be no more liquor as long as he remained with us.

We had been some months too late, and the rains had caught us in the swamps, whence native women eventually carried out the remnants of our once fine equipment. We were full of fever, bitten nearly to death by the swarms of mosquitoes, and practically penniless ; and altogether the trip was one long disaster. Yet, though the man who took us there was a drunkard and utterly unreliable, I still believe that there was some foundation for his tale, and that " Emerald Valley " may yet make the fortune of a better planned and luckier expedition. Telfer, who had had a rough time in the Kalahari, collapsed with fever as soon as we reached Delagoa, and had to remain there. Shadford, my other companion, and I got back to Johannesburg, where he developed blackwater fever, and lay in a hotel for days in a desperate state, whilst I tramped from office to office in an attempt to raise the necessary finances for the opening of a water-route to the Kalahari pans—when once Government had made up its mind to allow of such a thing !

Meanwhile I found a large accumulation of letters awaiting me—several of them months old—and

amongst them a number urging me to return to Upington, where several options on supposed diamond properties were now obtainable. More, a wire reporting my return from Portuguese territory elicited the news that a new and reliable guide to "Brydone's diamonds" had materialised at Upington, and that if I did not secure him pretty quick, others would do so, and "jump" the rich mine near the Bak River, for which I had already had a try (see Chapter XII).

Altogether there were a good many reasons why a rapid return to the vicinity of the Kalahari was desirable, for in spite of the delay in obtaining the fruit of our desert trip, we could not conceive that we should eventually be "turned down" by the Government. Ministers and Secretaries were away stumping or holiday-making, and I could not wait in Johannesburg till their return. I had obtained the promise of the requisite finances for the water-route when the time came; meanwhile, however, it would be better not to neglect new opportunities, and, thanks to the help of certain staunch friends, I was soon on my way once more to the region of sand and t'samma.

This was on November 1st, 1913. Ever since early in June I had been living a life of constant worry, anxiety, and hardship which had made me look back with regret to those lonely dunes of the Kalahari, where at least there were no crocodiles, few mosquitoes, and less fever, and where the absence of water seemed rather an advantage when fresh from the sodden, steaming marshes of the Incomati and Lebombo.

Telfer was still down with fever at Delagoa Bay, and Shadford, a wreck of the strong man he had been, in a like case in Johannesburg, whilst even I, fever-salted as I had considered myself, had turned yellow to the whites of my eyes, shook periodically with fits of ague that threatened to lose me all the teeth the t'samma had left, and had to live principally on quinine. A week later I was back in Gordonia,

where the dry air and glorious sunshine of the finest climate in the world soon drove away the effect of the "emerald picnic."

At Upington I found that the "guide" who claimed to know the way to the cave and hollow mountain of Brydone's story near the Bak River was a certain trooper in the C.M.P. named Trollip, a gigantic chap of about 6 ft. 3 ins., who had been through the country in question at the latter end of the Hottentot rebellion. Trekking back from German territory, he had passed through a celebrated gorge known as "Oorlogs Kloof" (Battle Kloof), and thence through the wild hills I have described in Chapter XII, and a Hottentot guide had pointed out a certain mountain as being the place "where the diamonds were."

This was by no means the precise information I had been led to expect from the wires and letters I had received; still, I was convinced that I had been hot upon the trail on my previous trip, and jumped at the chance of following up this additional clue.

The native who had showed Trollip the spot could not be found, though we rode over half Gordonia looking for him, but a Bastard who had been also one of the party with Trollip in the mountains was induced to accompany us; and, the police trooper himself having obtained leave of absence, on November 22nd I again set out for the Great Falls and the German Border.

In addition to Trollip and the Bastard (Carl van Rooy by name), I had with me a young half-breed Hottentot named Gert, who had been with me in the Kalahari, and a friend from Upington named Ford-Smith, who wanted to see the Falls, try a new-fangled American repeating shot-gun, which acted like a pump and was almost as elegant, and incidentally bring back a few diamonds himself.

By a variety of conveyances, horses, Cape cart, ox-cart, etc., we got to the Great Falls, which I looked at with more interest than ever since I had

heard that the Union Government intended utilising their enormous power in the near future. We stayed a day near the Great Cataract, partly to further explore its terrific gorges, and partly because our horses had got away in the night and gone into the mountains to look for grass, and whilst waiting for them, Carl, the guide, gave us an exhibition of fancy shooting which I would not have missed for anything. He first of all asked me if I had Martini cartridges, which I had. He then produced from the bottom of the cart the weirdest weapon I have ever seen, which is saying a good deal ; for in this wild part of South Africa it is no uncommon thing to find rifles and guns of ancient make that, having been broken and patched and cobbled with raw hide, nails, tacks, wire, and solder, in the most extraordinary manner, are yet capable of doing excellent work in the hands of their owners, who know their little peculiarities.

But van Rooy's was the limit ! It had been a Martini, one of the old, long, straight-stocked ones, that kick like a mule ; but one day it had fallen off a waggon and a wheel had passed over it, breaking the stock and bending the barrel almost double. Thrown away as beyond repair, it had been rescued by Carl, who had long coveted a rifle (as every man on the Border does), and who had determined to repair it. The stock he had carved from an old ox-yoke, and the barrel was fastened to it with a combination of all the home-made devices mentioned above ; but the crowning feat had been the straightening of the barrel, which he had accomplished by making it red-hot and hammering it.

The result was startling, for not only was it battered and dented badly by the hammer, but the foresight was a good eighth of an inch out of alignment with the back ; in fact it curved to such an extent that it suggested an attempt at a weapon designed to shoot round corners.

I could not conceive that anyone would have the temerity to try and shoot with it, but Carl was

immediately on his dignity when I said so, and wanted to know what was the matter with his gun. He said, moreover, that the hills were full of *tijgers*, and unless he could have cartridges for that gun he wouldn't go a step farther ; moreover he wanted some practice, as he had rarely tried the gun since he " straightened " it.

It appeared like aiding and abetting suicide, but at last I gave him them, and we scattered for cover, whilst he lay down and let her go. There was a most terrific bang, and I wondered what the coroner would say, but Carl was still there, though at least three yards back from where he had first fired, rubbing his shoulder thoughtfully. But he was no funk, and with half a dozen shots had found out what allowance to make for the kink, and could hit a bottle at a hundred yards. And Ford-Smith, himself a " weapon fancier," and usually festooned with all sorts of weird shooting-irons, thereupon recognised him as a kindred spirit, and was soon swapping shooting yarns with this valiant gunner. He told Smith, if I remember rightly, that at a hundred yards he had to aim two yards to the right and two feet below the object, and I wondered how he would figure it out if a leopard charged him from a quarter that distance !

Next day, at Wag Brand, we had again to abandon our carts, packing sheer necessities upon two of the horses, and carrying a heavy load ourselves as we pushed forward along the pathless and precipitous slopes of the gorge, through which ran the Orange, and scarcely expecting to get the horses through. Within a few hundred yards of the start we had already come to grief, though luckily the accident was more ludicrous than serious.

For in negotiating a granite shoulder smoothly sloping into the water, the old white horse that was leading missed his footing, scrambled wildly as though on skates, reared up and fell with a terrible splash into the muddy water. His pack had been roped on with a long coil of Manila, and in his frantic

struggles this came loose and he was soon tangled up like a fish in a net, and it looked like losing both him and our precious pack. I jumped in with a knife and slashed his pack away, and we got both out farther down. And then we stood and laughed till the baboons came out on the rocky peaks and hooted us, for the poor old horse was the most ridiculous-looking object imaginable. He had been white before he fell in, now he looked like an equine rainbow.

Part of his multitudinous load had been a bag of yellow sugar from Upington. I do not pretend to know what it was dyed with, or why it should have been dyed at all, but all one side of him was a deep mustard yellow; a box of permanganate of potash crystals had tinted most of the rest of him from rose pink to deep purple; and a ball of washing-blue, which the only fastidious member of the party had brought, to be able to wash his shirts a nice colour, had completed the picture.

Of course a good deal of our scanty stores were utterly spoiled, and it meant short commons for the trip, but we were lucky to have saved anything, and were thankful for small mercies.

With great caution we successfully negotiated the rest of the bad places, and came to the mouth of the Molopo, whence the going was easy. Lower down, by a lovely stretch of placid water, and opposite the huge red mountain known as "Zee-coe-stuk," we found a number of Hottentots and *Beeste Damaras* with sheep, goats, and cattle, which Trollip shrewdly suspected had been stolen, for the few natives amongst these wild hills are vagrants and thieves, mostly descendants of the old free-booters who made this part of the Orange their fastness during the last century, or fugitives from justice. They were surly and suspicious, and would undoubtedly have liked to plunder the lot of us, but we were all well armed, and when they saw the quick-firing section and heavy artillery of Smith and Carl, they became quite civil. From them we



A BREAKDOWN ON THE ROAD FROM PRIESKA.
Showing washing-machine, sieves, stores, etc. Note the canvas water bag.



WASHING FOR DIAMONDS AT THE BASE OF THE ESCARPMENT AT NAKOB.
The rotary washing-machine is in the background.

succeeded in hiring a pack-cow, which lightened our load considerably, the old dear trotting along ahead of us in the most willing manner, climbing like a cat over rocks and stones, and with a half-grown calf running behind her.

A day later we were in the deep gorge of the Bak River, where we succeeded in getting both horses and cow to our old camping-place of Chapter XII. Apparently no human foot had trod those wild ravines since last I had been there with Paul and Borcherds, though higher up, where the German patrol-path crossed into our territory, there were signs that these gentlemen visited this remote part of the border more frequently than of yore. And the very next day we saw two troopers cross the ridge a mile or so away from us, and a tiny watch-fire in the mountains that night made us surmise that we had been seen, and that Hottentot police trackers had been left to watch us. So we did our searching with great circumspection, though we had often to penetrate German territory for some distance.

It soon became evident that neither van Rooy nor Trollip knew as much about the region as I did myself, and the only result of bringing them was to have a mountain pointed out that the other native had said that he had heard was the place where the diamonds were to be found (for here on the spot the precise information of both of them boiled down to that extent), and the identification of a huge gorge leading north-west into German territory as the famous "Oorlogs Kloof" of which I had heard so much.

Meanwhile, I acknowledge, both men made up for lack of knowledge by willingness to be of assistance, and from daylight till dark we clambered precipitous peaks, groped in caves and cañons, sifted the sand of gullies and gorges, till our hands were torn almost as badly as our boots and clothes. But still the place we sought could not be found, although there was proof forthcoming that somewhere in the vicinity

pipe Kimberlite existed. The complexity of the ravines, and the sand-choked nature of many, made the following-up of these indications extremely tedious work, especially as many of the ravines led into German territory, and we had to keep a sharp lookout in case we were observed. My friend Smith, whose feet gave in after a few excursions, usually stayed about the camp with a gun handy; for one day, when he had accompanied us along a sandy ravine for some distance, he found, in turning back, that a big leopard spoor had covered his own for most of the distance, the wily animal having evidently followed him, barely keeping out of sight! By the number of spoors in some of the ravines, the place fully merits its reputation for these *tijgers*, who are, however, so wily, and whose tawny coats harmonise so well with the red and yellow sandstone and deep shadow of the rocks, that, when standing motionless even a short distance away, it is almost impossible to see them till they move. We were well off for water, but soon ran short of supplies, and lived principally on klip-springer and rock rabbits (dassies).

At last Trollip's leave was up and he had to return, and with him went Ford-Smith and Carl, leaving the boy Gert and myself alone. As the horses went with them we sent most of our heavy stuff back, and retained the barest necessities: but with rifles, water, and a box of matches we were perfectly independent of everybody. And then the search really began, for we were both far more active than the men who had left us, willing as they had been, and we worked northward into what had once been tributary streams for long distances, until I had proof positive that at no very great distance higher up a diamond pipe, probably a whole group of pipes, did exist.

Whether the "long arm of coincidence" alone was responsible for the writer Brydone having placed a rich mine in these hills many years before, or whether, as I still believe, the yarn had been founded

upon an actual happening, I still cannot say; but I repeat there was now no doubt that in the near vicinity there was a mine.

We were not sure whether it would prove to be on British territory or German; certainly, however, it would be perilously near dwellings and on private property, and could only be searched for and located by a further expedition having permission to search such private lands.

When we arrived at this conclusion we were absolutely at the end of our stores, a small tin of Symington's Pea Flour, a pot of jam, and two tins of sardines being all that was left of the edibles. However, there were rope, tools, pots, and various gear, and Gert left me to go back to the Hottentots up the river, to bring back the pack-cow that had brought us there.

He brought it back a day or two later with the owner, who was surly when he found our tobacco and coffee were finished, and who wanted to clear off again and leave us to hump the things ourselves. However, he was " persuaded " not to do so, our things were packed on the cow, and we started our long walk back. My boots were literally in shreds, and my feet badly cut and bleeding, and as nearly the whole of the journey was over sharp rocks, I was in a terrible state by the time I got to " Zee-coe-stuk," where the Hottentots' encampment was. These people were now insolent to a degree; they demanded tobacco and coffee, and would not believe we had none. Gert showed them our kit, and the cow was unpacked and led away to rest and feed, but they were still derisive, and as there were a round dozen of them, and we were two, it looked as though there might be trouble. We were on a high, well-wooded bank, above a very deep part of the river, and Gert (who of course spoke Hottentot) said that they were openly discussing rushing us, and throwing us into the turbulent, rushing torrent. On the opposite bank, on the lower slopes of the mountain, which came almost sheer into the water, were a troop of

big baboons, and this gave me an idea which probably saved bloodshed.

They—the baboons—were about 300 yards away, four of them on a big rock at the edge of the water, and I gave them a magazineful in rapid succession. The second shot hit the rock in the centre of the group, and, "mushrooming," flew into flinders, which knocked all four of the big *baviaans* into the river, but I sent the remaining bullets amongst the others higher up, just for effect. I got the effect all right, for turning, I saw Gert, who had my short Martini carbine and was watching the Hottentots, almost doubled up with laughter, and the Hottentots running towards the rocks as fast as their legs would carry them. And in the rocks they stayed, and when the hour came for us to trek, there was neither Hottentot nor pack-cow. Gert went and parleyed with the women in the *pondhoeks*, but they could do nothing except demand coffee and *tabaki*, and the gentlemen up in the rocks evidently thought they had the whip hand, as we could go no farther without the cow. I got Gert to shout to them that if the cow was not brought back, we would go, and they merely laughed, doubtless thinking that the pack we should have to abandon would fall into their thieving hands. But I was determined otherwise. We made all essentials into two packets of about 60 lb. each, principally samples of ammunition and expensive prospecting gear, and the pots, tools, cords, and heavy impedimenta we very reluctantly but determinedly flung into the water.

As we were hidden by the thick trees, this procedure could not be seen by the Hottentots, and humping the remainder of our gear, we stole quietly away.

I suppose, with our rifles, etc., we had each about 60 lb. only, but the heat was very great, the silt beside the river, where our path lay, was heavy and intersected by numerous gullies, and within an hour I was quite prepared to throw the remainder into the Orange; but just as I had put the load down for about the twentieth time we heard a shout, and the

old cow came lumbering along with several of our late friends behind it. I ordered them back, except the driver, and as they saw me ram a magazineful of cartridges into my Mannlicher, they again performed " Home to the Mountains."

The rest of that day I walked as I had never walked before, occasionally tearing up a fresh strip from my scanty garments to bind afresh my feet, which were jagged and torn by sharp stones and pricked with thorns till every step was anguish. By night we were at Wag Brand, the old cow having made light of the bad rocks where our old horse had fallen in on the outward journey.

We had hoped to find a few natives here, but the *pondhoek* was empty, and we could not even borrow a pot to make a little mealie pap from the tiny remainder of our meal and pea-flour. We made a few cakes on the embers, and slept like logs. In the morning we were desperately hungry, and though we had set night-lines, there were no fish on them. We could hear guinea-fowl and pheasant calling everywhere in the dense wood, but could not see them. At last Gert put a bullet through a pheasant, blowing it to bits, which we managed to roast on the embers, and a very tough *hors-d'œuvre* it proved. The Hottentot demanded food—not without reason; and on our telling him he would get some at Waterfal that night, if there happened to be any people there, he demanded his money and proposed returning. He had had more than his share of the pheasant, including the liver wing, and as I did not wish to be unjust, I gave him the only handful of meal left. This left me with about a tea-cup of pea-flour and a fragment of rusty bacon about 2 inches square to last us two days' hard trek to Miller's store at North Furrow, Kakamas, should we fail to shoot anything *en route*. But that Hottentot was a perfect Oliver Twist. He made *asch-kook* of the meal and devoured it, whilst we sat and partook of the smell. And then he demanded more! I told him to pack the cow and trek, and if he were lucky

he would get something at Waterfal that night. Then, being full of good hot meal, he got cheeky and thrust his Mongol face in mine in a way that could have but one ending. So I knocked him down, three times to be exact, whereupon he became most cheerful, and drove the old cow towards the Great Falls in fine style. We were there by sunset, and I took the boy Gert to see the Cataract, being a bit dubious of the first stream, but traversing it quite safely. The Great Fall itself was more awe-inspiring than ever at sunset, and Gert was so impressed that I had great difficulty in getting him to cross the stream on our way back—he could not swim.

There was not a soul at the Falls, and we could shoot nothing, and short as was the distance, what with the heat and the state of my feet, it took us all next day to get to the store at Krantz Kop, Kakamas North Furrow. We had an alleged meal at midday by the river, where Gert caught a small barbel the size of a herring. It was full of bones and tasted vilely, but with the aid of the pea-flour, and the bacon frizzled on a prospecting shovel, we ate it, bones and all.

We got to the store in the evening. I was literally in rags, and with barely enough of my *veldtschoen* uppers left to hold together the blood-stained rags on my feet.

At the store I found friends, the magistrate, bank manager, and lawyer from Upington, who were on their way to the Great Falls ; though I still believe they had a sneaking idea of making a desperate dash into the Noup Hills themselves to try and get hold of my mine !

Anyhow, there they were, prepared for " roughing it " in great style. They had a waggon crammed with provisions, on the top of which they had stretched several mattresses and at least one feather-bed. They had several riding-horses as well, and the capacious vehicle was overflowing with every kind of eatable and drinkable. They had immaculate white suits and big pith helmets, and altogether

quite put my poor old cow and myself in the shade.

I was most anxious to get back to Upington, but they inveigled me into returning with them to the Falls, and so for a few days I played at "roughing it" with them, and found it far from unpleasant after so much of the real thing. I paid my cow-driver exactly what I had agreed to, which astonished him, and he there and then declared his willingness to take my pack right on the 200-odd miles to the railway at Prieska, or, for the matter of that, to Cape Town if needs be! And he was quite hurt when I refused, but soon recovered under the stimulating effect of a visit to the store, where he bought tobacco, and sugar, and coffee, and golden syrup, and " Pain Killer " to his heart's content, leaving on the home track with a pack almost as big as he had brought out.

CHAPTER XIX

RESULT OF KALAHARI TRIP—NAKOB—LACK OF POLICE ON FRONTIER—WORKING A KIMBERLITE PIPE—UKAMAS—DRUNKEN GERMAN OFFICERS—SLOW TREKKING—A BAD SMASH.

At Upington I took the preliminary steps for obtaining the right to prospect the lands to which the indications on the border had pointed, a task which proved both long and tedious. And meanwhile, whilst negotiations were still pending with the scattered and absentee owners of these huge desert farms, I at last received the Government's decision as to the Kalahari. And it was an adverse one: admitting the interest of my report on this "unexplored" region, and even of its scientific value, but refusing to take my samples of Kimberlite, etc., as proof of the existence of diamond pipes in the Kalahari Game Reserve, and refusing me any further facilities in that direction.

So we had risked our lives and our money in vain, and all the castles we had built on those desert pipes met the fate at any time likely to overtake such edifices based upon the sand—of a Government promise.

However, it was no good squealing, and as soon as the right to prospect my newly found area was forthcoming, I started again for the border. This was on March 17th, 1914, when I left Cape Town with a full equipment of diamond-washing gear, to thoroughly test the region north of the Noup Hills, and in the immediate vicinity of the German South-West Border.

Handicapped by a heavy equipment, my progress from the railhead at Prieska was maddeningly slow, and it was not until April 8th that I at length reached

my destination, Nakob, a tiny police post on the border, and the "port of entry" into German territory.

In spite of its comparative importance as the customs "port" for the southern trade-routes, this post at Nakob was one of the loneliest, most isolated habitations in South Africa.

It was simply a little shanty of corrugated iron so small as to barely afford shelter for the three troopers stationed there, and who, having no stable, tethered their horses amongst the thorn-trees near by. South of them stretched the wild country I have described, the Noup Hills and Bak River, with not a single inhabitant for the whole difficult day's ride to the Orange, and more days beyond it. North of them, and wellnigh fifty miles away, was the similar post of Obopogorop where two other troopers were marooned, and thence a similar stretch of awful dune country had to be crossed to reach Rietfontein—the northern post of the camel police which I have already described, and where there were about a dozen men.

This represented the whole police force guarding (?) the long desert frontier of Gordonia and German South-West Africa—less than twenty men isolated and separated from each other by great distances of desert and difficult country, in many places cumbered by huge dunes of loose sand, through which transport was impossible, and which rendered long detours necessary. And these difficult, devious, and waterless paths were the only means of communication between them, for neither telephone nor telegraph-wire existed! Between them and their headquarters at Upington stretched a good eighty miles also of wellnigh uninhabited country, whilst their nearest store was at Zwartmodder, a tiny place in the bed of the Molopo, forty miles due east, and therefore that distance from the border.

Except for a few miserable Hottentot *pondhocks* and the mud houses of a couple of Bastards, there were no other inhabitants of this important boundary

post. They had got water in a well at a little distance from the post, and I soon found that my sphere of action would be limited to a radius within reach of this water, for there was none other for a very great distance in either direction.

A few days after my arrival I was snugly encamped some miles north of the police post, and within a stone's throw of German territory, my tents being pitched in a deep ravine running into an escarpment of higher land. These deep, abrupt ravines honeycombed the country in all directions, and in them there was a certain amount of vegetation, though the surface of the plateau or tableland above was principally a stone-strewn wilderness over which one could ride for days without seeing a human being or the trace of one.

One of these ravines was, I found, the upper part of the Bak River, in which I had discovered my indications farther south ; and within a few days I had confirmed my original conviction that hereabouts was the source of the Kimberlite I had found. Much of the country was hidden by a huge accumulation of sand, but on the higher land I soon found, not one but a whole group of pipes.

On the most accessible of these I began work in earnest, though even there the difficulties were very great. First of all a road had to be made through rock, bush, and débris over which to bring stores, and, above all, the large quantity of water necessary for a rotary washing machine ; and part of this track had to negotiate the almost perpendicular part of the escarpment, for the pipe lay on the top of the plateau. And at this rise, in spite of all precautions, barrels, tanks, and every other water-utensil I possessed were smashed in turn.

I soon gathered a miscellaneous gang of about a dozen "boys," Young Gert, who had stuck to me in many a tight corner, "bossing" them very efficiently. There were Hottentots, Bastards, Damaras, and Ovampos from near the Kunene River in the north of German territory, and two Bushmen

Altogether a wild and polyglot lot, clad mostly in rags and tatters, and most of them "wanted" by the Germans over the border. However, they did not work badly, though they took a lot of feeding. Of course we were entirely self-supporting, for I had brought a large supply of meal, coffee, sugar, tobacco, and other necessities, dry wood was plentiful in the ravines, and the camp, with huge fires burning and a savoury smell of roasting buck or hot *roster-kook*, was a most pleasant place to return to after a long day in the pipe or the veldt. I had a terrier for companion, and was far from lonely, and once in a while rode down to the police camp and saw the troopers, and heard the news brought in by the rare waggons or wayfarers from Upington and the far-distant world beyond. And day after day, once the gang knew their work at the pipe, I explored every gully and likely spot for many miles around, generally on foot, but occasionally, for the longer distances, taking an old nag who was as surefooted as a goat and from whose back I could shoot without fear of being bucked off. Much of this prospecting was in German territory, which to the north was as wild and pathless as our own, and where the rare patrols could be avoided with ease. Buck and the magnificent *gom paauws* were plentiful, and kept the camp fairly well supplied with meat: any little deficiency for the "boys'" pot being usually made up by giving Gert two cartridges (at most) and my short Martini-Enfield carbine—his favourite weapon—and telling him that his shooting must be done in German territory. His weakness used to be for ostrich meat, thick luscious steaks of it usually forming the "boys'" Sunday dinner, looking exactly like rump-steak and cooked in the thick breast-fat of the huge bird, which swarmed in the locality.

The pipe I had chosen to test was peculiarly situated, on the top of the plateau and right upon the extreme edge of British territory; so close indeed to German soil that the international beacon marking the actual twentieth degree of east longitude (the

boundary-line) stood within a few yards of the well-defined western wall of the pipe, and in full view of the shafts we were sinking.

From the edge of the escarpment, a few hundred yards from this beacon, a magnificent view could be obtained of both British and German territory, south-east, south, and south-west, the irregular peaks that penned the lonely Orange River being visible along the whole of the horizon in that direction. Over the whole vast space, one tiny habitation alone was visible; the little police post at Nakob, at the foot of the escarpment, and barely two miles away. From this beacon post the experienced observer could pick up several of the other signposts dotted here and there at irregular intervals amongst wild bush and rock along the twentieth degree, the actual boundary, which was, however, pathless and difficult to follow.

The corresponding German police post, also usually known as Nakob, was not built opposite our own little post, but near a very prominent granite hill some two miles south of it, where there was water on the German side, and in the vicinity of which our own post at one time stood. (These minute and tedious particulars as to the position of the two posts are necessary to enable the reader to follow what happened at this spot a few months later, at the outbreak of war.)

We saw little of the German police, who were few, and on excellent terms with our own men along the border, and whose lot, compared with that of our men, was a fairly easy one. For they were but eighteen miles from their base at Ukamas, where a couple of hundred troops were stationed, and from whence there was telephonic and telegraphic communication all over German territory. There was a doctor there, a "hotel" and store, and good roads led to it; in short, compared to our own side of the border, a measure of civilisation was within easy reach. These German mounted police belonged to a *corps d'élite*, each trooper having been a senior

non-commissioned officer in the Imperial German Army, and they were for the most part well-educated men, and especially expert in cartography. Part of their duties lay in preparing exhaustive maps of the localities in which they were stationed, and I have been shown, by them, maps of our own side of the border, showing minute and accurate detail utterly wanting on our own charts.

For weeks I led a most strenuous life, never idle enough to have a dull moment, in spite of the fact that, except for my gang of natives, I was quite alone. Besides the clearing of the sand and débris from the pipe, the cartage of water and other routine work, there were a thousand tasks to see to: trees to fell for timbering shafts, or to be hewn into rough windlasses; charcoal to burn for the sharpening of picks; tanks to tinker and solder; the obtaining of fresh meat for a ravenous family of a dozen or more, each of whom, if left to himself, would eat half a buck at a meal; and in short the whole gamut of "jack-of-all-trades" tasks that have to be performed by a prospector in such a spot.

There was an occasional break in the routine in the shape of a longer trip in search of other prospects, and more than one night spent far away on the wide veldt, with the path lost; but by remembering the cardinal fact that a line due south on the plateau would always bring me to the escarpment which could be followed "home," I always got back with no worse experience than being half frozen, for the nights were now very cold, and the days glorious with bright sunshine, and the air like dry champagne. One day, in trying to make my own way to Zwartmodder, across the veldt, I got badly out of the path, and night found me in dunes as wild as any I had seen in the Reserve, and in which a bitterly cold wind froze me to the marrow as I crouched under a bush till morning, clad in nothing but a thin shirt and trousers.

I was, as I afterwards found, a bare ten miles from Zwartmodder; but in these very same dunes,

only a few years back, a police trooper lost his way and died of thirst.

One other trip that will never be forgotten was to the Noup Hills again, and into the famous Oorlogs Kloof, where, with Gert and a Bastard named Nicholas Cloete, I made one more bid for "Brydone's diamonds," and, failing them, for the *tijgers* that infested the wild gullies there.

But that I have striven all through this narrative to avoid all shooting yarns, I could let my pen run on for a full chapter over that particular hunt and the strange things I found there; but I must leave all that, and pass on to the end of May, when, after six weeks of systematic work and exhaustive search in all directions, I was in possession of data that made a trip to the nearest telegraph-station imperative. This meant Ukamas, the German township I have mentioned, and which so far I had avoided.

I therefore rode down to our own police post, and reported that I was taking a horse over the border, for which I had obtained the requisite permission before leaving Upington; thence I rode on to the German post, and had to give minute particulars as to who and what I was, whence from, and whither bound, to the little trooper in charge there. I had had several chats with the little chap before; he spoke French extremely well, and was, I believe, an Alsatian. Anyway he was a very obliging chap, and quite unlike the uncouth, brutal troopers of the regiment stationed at Ukamas. This ordeal over, and a full description of both myself and my horse entered in the *Ne Varietur* kept for the purpose, I rode the eighteen miles into the little frontier town over good, well-defined roads laid out by the military, and with a valuable aid to the traveller at every cross-road in the shape of a stone signpost giving distance and direction to inhabited places in the locality.

Ukamas, although but a tiny village, and a very long distance from the railway at Kalkfontein, was certainly a credit to the Germans, the post-office,

houses, and barracks being attractive-looking, substantially built edifices, most of them, I was given to understand, having been built by the military stationed there, many of whom were artisans.

There was one Englishman in the place, a Jew storekeeper, who had at one time been in the British Army, and who was on that account baited in the most intolerable manner by the officers and soldiers who were the principal customers of his bar. From this little outpost I was able to send a cable to Cape Town, the post-office operator being, like every other official in the place, a soldier. Here my horse had to be handed to the military vet, for the *mallin* test, and I was kept kicking my heels for some days in the forlorn little stores, where every evening the rough troopers, in their long blue-grey greatcoats, congregated to drink beer and play *scart*, smoking the big cigars that form part of their rations, and cracking alleged jokes at the expense of the little Jew landlord and of the rough-looking prospector sitting so quietly in a corner.

These men, however, rough and overbearing as they were, were harmless compared with their officers, who drank to excess in front of their men, and whose intolerable treatment of the Englishman behind the bar used to compel me to get out and right away from them, lest I should be unable to control myself and get into trouble.

They picked no quarrel with me personally, for though I was roughly dressed, I had shown my Foreign Office passport to their superior, and I suppose they had been told to let me alone. But they talked *at* me as I sat there quite quietly pretending to read, talked about what a poor lot all " Englanders " were, anyway, and how only the worst of them ever came to Africa, and how they, the Germans, the salt of the earth, were bound, sooner or later, to take over the whole of it from the Cape to the Zambesi, and a lot of other balderdash, all in front of their admiring men. Then, as the beer began to work, they would start on D. about the British

Army, what rank he held in it, if all the officers were like him, and so on till they got the little man rattled. Their crowning witticism would come when he dived down beneath the counter for more beer for them, when at a signal all four of them would bring their riding-whips down on the rickety counter, with a crash close to his head, to show their men "how an English officer could stand fire"!

This never failed to bring down the house, and send me flying out before I got into serious trouble. How the man stood it beat me! It is true that these officers were subalterns only, but in any other army in the world they would have been cashiered, for never a day passed but that they were vilely and blatantly drunk in full sight of their men. Especially was this the case on the Sunday when they were celebrating the approaching departure of the veterinary surgeon for Germany, and when, at eleven o'clock in the morning, they reeled from their quarters arm-in-arm and staggering drunk. In the bar for the rest of the day they excelled themselves, and I again heard the toast of "The Day" being drunk, though I did not imagine, as I sat there with my hands itching, how soon that "Day" would come.

Altogether, with the exception of the doctor, who was not so bad, they were a trio of contemptible, bullying cads, and I thanked God when my horse was at last pronounced to have passed the *mallin* test, and I was at liberty to clear back over the border, to bad roads and tumble-down shacks, it is true, but to free air again, where a man could go and come as he liked, free from anything even remotely resembling the detestable junkerdom of this "Kolonial" edition of Prussianised Germany.

Once back "home" in my gully I had to make immediate plans for a trip to Cape Town, not only to arrange for further development north, but to make preparations for working in German territory if needs be, which I believed could be managed better through the German Consulate-General in



AN INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY BEACON BETWEEN GERMAN (LATE) SOUTH-WEST AFRICA TERRITORY AND BRITISH (GORDONIA).

Cape Town than by a personal application in Windhuk.

Unfortunately, there were no travellers coming through about this time, and as I had a large amount of samples to take, my horse was useless; but a few days later a donkey-waggon which had been to Ukamas with oranges from Upington returned to British territory on its way home, and I jumped at the opportunity.

It took us eight days to cover the eighty-odd miles to Upington, partly on account of the scarcity of fodder *en route*, and partly because of the weak and half-starved donkeys, but principally due to the terrible sand-dunes that cumbered the path(?) chosen by the driver.

This was an entirely new route to me, partly down the wide sand-choked bed of the Bak River to an old deserted house called Aries, thence across pathless, boulder-strewn mountains into an absolute crater called Noedap, where dwelt a few Hottentots, to whom my driver wanted to sell the remainder of his oranges, and thence into a weird and picturesque spot in the Molopo bed known as Cnydas, where there were fine water-pits sunk in the deeply silted dry river-bed to a depth of about 40 feet, and operated with a long pivoted pole with a weight at one end, exactly like those in use in Egypt

Meanwhile we were having a rough time of it for food, for, relying on seeing plenty of game, and knowing that I should easily keep pace with the waggon even when ranging for miles on either side of it, I had brought no food but a little meal, and when for three solid days I hunted in vain without pulling trigger, the meal had gone; and as Nicol the driver was as badly off as myself, we had to live on oranges! Then we fell in with a *smouse* (an itinerant trader), whose small waggon reeked of the illicit *dop* he had been selling to the Hottentots and Bastards, but who had little left but the smell. All he could do was to sell us a few dried apricots full of sand and tough as leather, and with this

addition to our *cuisine* of oranges and an occasional Namaqua partridge we "managed" till we got to Upington. By this time motors had become a regular means of conveyance between Upington and Prieska, and in about the same time as it had taken us to negotiate a mile or two of dunes, I had been whisked to the line and Cape Town, where I made the necessary arrangements for extending my operations in both British and German territory, and on June 23rd, 1914, I left Cape Town again for the border.

At Prieska I met Maritz, then a Major, and Commandant of the Defence Force in charge of the North-West Districts. I had heard much of the man, of his courage and strength, and his dare-devil exploits when with the Boer forces during the Anglo-Boer War, also of his doings in German South-West Africa, whither he had migrated, like many another "irreconcilable" after Vereeniging. There he had been transport officer for the Germans during the Hottentot and Herero Rebellion, and had become far more Germanised than most of the freedom-loving Boers who had tried to make a home in that country, the majority of whom had soon been extremely glad to get back once again to British rule.

But the hectoring, bullying manners of the German officers were apparently much to the taste of "Maanie," and when at the formation of the Union Defence Force he returned to the Union and soon blossomed forth as a Major in command of the North-West District of the Cape Province (the wild region bordering German territory), he soon showed the *jongen* who came under his sway that the days of the old, easy-going commando system of their fathers was a thing of the past, and that rigid discipline had come in place of it. He soon became a perfect terror to them, and many a tale had I heard at Keimoos, where the Upington men had gone for training, as to the shock he had given many a young Boer who, fresh from the lonely farms of

the back-veldt, had thought to treat him as an equal.

But, martinet as he had become, and feared as he was by them, he undoubtedly won the respect of these ignorant and impressionable young fellows, many of whom had never seen a railway or heard anything of the outside world, except from the biased and embittered lips of the irreconcilables and so-called " Hertzogites " (or Nationalists) who formed the bulk of the scattered population in these remote regions.

To his men his great argument was that by discipline alone could they ever become a fighting force worthy of the name, and that, had the Boer forces been properly disciplined, the British could never have won the war.

Whatever may have been his faults, Maritz was no hypocrite ; he never professed to have any other feeling than that of hearty detestation for the English ; and though the Union Jack floated over his training-camp, there can be no doubt that he hoped from the first that in the Defence Force he was helping to forge a weapon that would some day be turned against the *Uitlander* whose hated symbol it was.

Maritz, then, was in command of the Defence Force training-camp at Prieska when I arrived there, and as I had some business with him *re* a motor-car of his which had been burned in Namaqualand, I went up to the camp to see him. Rebel and traitor as he became, and probably was at heart then, it would be useless for me to say that he gave me a bad impression ; on the contrary, he impressed me most favourably during the hour or so I was in his company. An alert, bluff, soldierly man, well groomed and of medium height, he looked the officer to perfection ; but though sturdily built, he showed little signs of the enormous strength he was known to possess. His English was good, and his manner that of an educated man—though I have often heard him described as illiterate since his defection !

He was full of curiosity as to where I had been

in G.S.W., and what I knew of German doings there; like every other Boer who had seen their troops in the Herero and Hottentot rebellions, he expressed unbounded contempt for their fighting methods, and made the same assertion as most Boer leaders used then to make, that with a commando of 500 Boers he would take the country, any day!

And I believe he meant it, for at that time the contempt of the German for the Boer was only equalled by the contempt of the Boer for the German.

I got through to Upington without mishap—it was something of an undertaking even those few short years ago—and then, as I was preparing for great things, luck turned dead against me.

I fell ill, and was laid up for days at the little hotel, and when at last I got under way again, worse was to follow. I had taken my friend the orange merchant for the return journey, as he had proved a very good chap, and I needed a white man for transport at the camp, and by his advice we had taken the back trail through Cnydas (where Maritz afterwards turned rebel) and through a mountain-encompassed hollow called Noedap, where one of the natives had a horse I greatly coveted. It was nothing to look at, a shabby-looking little blue roan (*blaauw schimmel*) pony of about 14.2, but a perfect marvel for endurance up to forty or fifty miles a day, in sand and over mountains, and capable apparently of living on stones. I intended working two gangs at least that distance apart, and this pony, if I could get it, would enable me to run both at once. We got into the crater—it merits the name—and after a day's delay I became the possessor of the little nag.

So steep was the climb out of Noedap in the direction we were going that the donkeys utterly failed to get the waggon up the terrific slope, and eventually a team of oxen had to be inspanned by the Bastards to get it to the plateau above. Meanwhile I rode on ahead, finding the pony all that could be desired. A few hours later I came to the

steep descent into the Bak River near Aries, a most lonely and desolate place, but with water in the stream-bed. There was no path down the steep, rock-strewn slope, and my pony was picking its way down most gingerly when I suddenly spied an old folding stool, strung with rimpi, and such as the Boers use in their waggons, lying amongst the boulders a few feet away. How long it had been there it would be hard to surmise, for there was no path and nothing to tempt a wayfarer that way, and, feeling curious, I stopped the pony, and tried to dismount and pick it up. I say " tried," for my big heavy boots had jammed in the small stirrups, and as I struggled to clear them, the pony caught sight of the stool, shied violently and threw me with a sickening crash on to the sharp rocks. One foot caught, and as the pony sprang forward, I struck the pointed boulder with my full weight, right beneath my outstretched left arm, smashing in three of my ribs with a gruesome crunch, and for the time knocking me senseless. Luckily the pony dragged me only a yard or two and then stood stock-still on the steep slope, whilst I hung with one foot still jammed in the stirrup.

I came to still fixed in that fashion, my face and shoulder badly cut and bruised, and blood running from my mouth, and my broken ribs apparently pressing into my lung, for my breath whistled like a pair of broken bellows, and every breath was an agony. I thought I was about finished, and certainly, if the horse had started again, I should have been. One arm was helpless, and for what seemed an eternity I tried in vain to release my foot, fearing every fresh effort would make the pony bolt. At last I got my hunting-knife under the laces and ripped them and got my foot free, and fainted. I was in a bad place, the waggon was an hour or more behind, and would not come within nearly half a mile of the spot ; I was so badly hurt that I could not stand, and might easily lie there days before I should be searched for. If the driver did not find me, no one would ;

and if once he passed me and trekked on he would conclude I had gone on to Nakob, and I should not be missed till he got there a day or two later. Anyway I was in such agony that I thought an hour or two would finish me, but after a bit I remembered my rifle, and tried to get it from where it had been flung with me from the saddle. And at last I was able to fire a shot, and felt all the better for the rifle, for there were four or five vultures already on the scene—though I afterwards found they had other legitimate business on hand in the shape of a dead ox about a hundred yards away.

At length, when I had given up hope, and was wondering whether I could ever crawl to the water about half a mile away, or whether I could live two or three days where I was till they began to look for me, I suddenly saw an angel in the shape of a "Bushman," the little black urchin of a *voorlooper*, who came creeping through the rocks as though stalking me. I found afterwards that, hearing the shot, he had left the waggon and cleared to a high ridge to see what game I had got, and from it had seen me lying among the rocks a long distance away. Even then he simply thought I was "creeping" a buck, and it was only when he had waited a long time that he came along to see what I was about.

However, there he was, and never was angel more welcome. We had no brandy, but Nicol, my driver, soon made me some tea, and after washing me and making me as comfortable as possible amongst the rocks, he rode off on the innocent cause of all the trouble to see if any help could be obtained at Nakob.

The night was bitterly cold, and in spite of my blankets I was about frozen by the time he returned at midnight with a young trooper named Human. Unfortunately, they had no bandages or first-aid appliances, and could do little, but as my breathing was terribly bad and I was in great pain, the young trooper galloped off again with the promise that he would ride into Ukamas, in German territory, and try to get the doctor. For on our own side of

the border there was no medical man nearer than Upington, and to send a wire there one had in any case to cross the border to Ukamas.

As it happened, there was no doctor at the little German post when Human got there, and he wired to Upington, where my old pal and fellow-adventurer Dr. Borcherds started out to look for me immediately, and by commandeering cars, laying violent hands on Cape carts and other vehicles, eventually got to me, in a Scotch cart drawn by six bullocks and driven by himself, after forty-eight hours of almost incessant trekking.

So, after being within a few hours' distance of my mine, I had to be taken back to Upington by slow degrees, for practically all one side of me was badly smashed, and I was extremely lucky to have escaped with my life.

Cooped up in a chair and swathed like a mummy, I made extremely slow progress in Upington, and feeling that I should never get better unless I got once more on the veldt, I at length cajoled the doctor into letting me start again, though I was still bandaged, and so weak I had to be lifted into the waggon and propped up in a chair. With me came my old fellow-voyager of the Bak River, Mr. Ford-Smith, anxious to try still another new gun, and to add to the store of hunting yarns for which he was already famed.

CHAPTER XX—AND LAST

WAR!—VIOLATION OF BRITISH TERRITORY AT NAKOB—THE END.

We left Upington on Thursday, July 30th, 1914. The bi-weekly post had just arrived, and papers from the outside world brought the news of the ominous war-cloud gathering in Europe. It seemed like looking for trouble to start for the border of German territory at such a time; and half in jest, I remarked as much to the polyglot gathering at the door of the hotel who had gathered to see me start.

"It's quite likely by the time I get to the border we shall be at war with Germany!" I remarked, and there was a chorus of protest.

England might be—but they? What was it to do with them? They were willing to make money out of either side of the border, and for many reasons preferred being British in name, but if it came to fighting, that was quite another matter!

But in those days most of the "British" in Upington were Russian Jews, and most of the Dutchmen "Nationalists," whose conception of their duty to Empire was to take all they could get and give nothing in return. There was also a large German element in the village, and a large amount of German money always *en évidence*; in fact, the "mark" had the purchasing power of a shilling in every store, and except in the bank or post-office English silver was never seen. Anyway, I was far too anxious to get back to my neglected prospects to "wait and see," for I had a number of men eating their heads off at Nakob; and so away we went on

one of the bitterest trips I remember. It was an open waggon, without cover of any kind, and a bitterly cold wind and driving rain set in within a few hours of our leaving the dorp ; the jolting of the springless vehicle over the rough track shook my half-healed ribs till I was one big ache from head to foot ; it rained nearly all night as we crouched over the blinding smoke of a cow-dung fire at the bleak outspan, and altogether I began to think I had been a fool to leave the shelter of a roof. However, on the third day out the sun shone, and I climbed into the saddle again. A few hours of trotting and I was a different man ; for there is no medicine like the sunshine and a good horse. We were too cold to linger by the way, and trekked at all hours through the lonely and desolate wastes of Van Rooi's Vley, Rooi Dam, Lootz's Pits, and Cnydas, wild and remote places scarce known even in Upington, but all of them to become prominent a month or two later as the scene of Maritz's first open treachery. So cold was it at night that the hoar-frost gathered thick on our blankets till it looked like snow, and ice stood in the buckets beside us. I had not been able to lie down since my accident, but at Longklip I at length ventured to do so, and had the first real rest for three weeks or more.

Late at night on Tuesday, August 4th, we arrived at Nakob, and in the morning the police told us that war had already been declared between Germany and France, and that there had been heavy fighting on the Belgian border. This news was from the German police over the border, for we ourselves brought the latest news from our own distant news centre. Speculation was rife as to whether England would be drawn in or not, and the three troopers at our lonely little post, relying for news on a possible enemy over the border, were anxious and uneasy at what I was able to tell them.

However, war or no war, they had their routine duty to do, and on the morning of August 6th, Troopers Hall and Green left for Upington with a

prisoner, leaving young Human, a young Dutch trooper from Kakamas, and quite a boy, in sole charge of the lonely post. For they had no other means of dealing with prisoners—no lock-up but their own living and sleeping room, and as one man alone could not guard a prisoner night and day over the long journey to headquarters, the major portion of the "garrison" had to escort him.

Meanwhile, having found my gang of "boys" still in existence, I set them to work in earnest, for I was too near German territory to feel comfortable, and I this time pitched my camp at the base of the escarpment about a mile only from the police post, and in sight of it. Finding it impossible to properly cope with the problem of dragging sufficient water to the pipe to "wash" the blue ground there, I adopted the plan of bringing the latter down to the level; but on the 8th the young trooper rode up to my camp to show me a "dispatch" which a galloper had brought out the forty-odd miles from Zwartmodder. It was to warn the police that war with Germany was imminent, and that they must be on their guard against "covert acts" against their patrols. Poor boy, he spoke English well, but scarcely understood the official language of the document; as for the patrols—well, he was absolutely alone! His nearest mate was at Zwartmodder, over forty-odd miles of bad road away, and from whence the message had been brought.

He had no other white man near him but ourselves, and we knew that barely eighteen miles away there was a garrison of two hundred Germans, not to mention the police along the actual border. The dispatch appeared to point to a possible raid on him at any moment, and we offered to stand by him till help arrived, as it surely would. Meanwhile we were working on the very edge of German territory, and our camp stood within a stone's-throw of it; our horses and cattle were in the habit of ranging over it at their sweet will, for there was no fence or actual boundary, and as the news spread amongst

the "boys" I had hard work to keep them from bolting. We worked feverishly all the next morning, German patrols passing in full view of us, but not molesting us. Meanwhile another trooper had arrived from Kakamas with the news that war had been declared on the previous Thursday. Fugitive Hottentots were now stealing over the border, and the news they brought appeared to point to a possible raid by the Germans, who had now forced their own farmers all along the border to drive their cattle twenty kilometres inland. Our own "boys," who had gone to look for the strayed horses, were chased for a couple of miles into our territory; and as we now heard that the well-disposed German mounted police who had been stationed along the border had been withdrawn, and their place taken by regular troops from Ukamas, we were more on the *qui vive* than ever. Still, I kept the gang hard at it, knowing that I could only work a few days unless the strong reinforcements we naturally expected were soon forthcoming. Meanwhile Hall and Green returned from Upington, and a further man came in from Kakamas, so the little garrison was now five men strong.

They had scarcely enough rations to keep them going, and were in hourly expectation of the arrival of a force of some kind to hold the line. The position of the little police hut could scarcely have been worse, from a defensive point of view. It was commanded on all sides by rocky, bush-clad ridges, in which ten thousand Germans could have hidden, and barely a quarter of a mile away, in German territory, rose a formidable *spitz kop* (conical hill), from the summit of which every approach to the British post could have been commanded. The place could have been rushed at any moment. The trooper in charge told me that his orders were to do nothing to provoke hostilities, and if attacked, to make no attempt to hold the post, but to fall back on Zwartmodder—forty miles away—where there were two men! But he realised only too well that,

should such an attack be made, he would have no earthly chance of getting away.

But we all fully expected a column to turn up to garrison this important—though neglected—little post; and day after day one of the men would ride to the high hills eastward, from which the roads to Upington could be seen for many miles, but there came no sign—no news; in fact, Nakob seemed to have been forgotten.

Meanwhile my friend Ford-Smith wandered round with a Remington rifle, in the gullies along our side of the border, practising at korhaan and dassies, and wishing they were Germans. He borrowed military buttons from the police, and put them on his shirt, to save himself from being shot as a *franc-tireur* should it come to a scrap; but—luckily for us—he had no chance of an outlet for his martial ardour, except one night when my old horse strayed back into the camp from somewhere over the German side at dead of night, and narrowly escaped annihilation at his hands. Those nights were extremely jumpy, for, as I have explained, we were within a stone's throw of enemy territory, an attack on the police camp was believed to be imminent, and that we should have shared in the trouble was beyond question. However, each morning we were able to flash "All's Well" with a mirror to each other, for the Germans still held their hand. Of course all communication between the two territories had ceased from the time that the outbreak of war was notified, but news still filtered through by means of natives, and spies were constantly coming amongst the Bastard and Hottentot hangers-on of the police post.

They could not be caught, but their constant inquiry was as to when the "troops" would arrive, though on this point they could have got scant information, for we were as ignorant and anxious as themselves! From a few legitimate stragglers who succeeded in evading the German police and getting over, we heard of the movements of troops,



GRANITE MONOLITH AT "LANGKLEP."
Afterwards the scene of a fight with Maritz.



WATER-PITS IN THE DRY MOLOPO AT NAKOB.
Where Maritz broke into rebellion

and it seemed fairly certain that the border police had been withdrawn from German Nakob, and that an officer, with twenty-five men and a machine-gun, had taken their place. The constant rumours of an impending attack made it impossible to keep the "boys" at their work, and as no news came of reinforcements, I had at length no alternative but to abandon the work and clear out.

On the morning of Saturday, August 15th, I washed my last load, dismantled the windlasses, and brought the light tools and gear down from the mine. As I went up to take a last look round, two of the troopers rode up from the post, and I took them to the international beacon on the edge of the escarpment, near where I had been working, and pointed out to them the whole line of these infrequent boundary-posts through the wild, solitary, pathless country south, towards my old prospecting-ground in the Noup Hills, near the Orange. They were new men, and did not know where the actual boundary lay in that direction. The day was scorching-hot and clear, and I was able to pick out many of the actual cairns, but on the whole vast expanse not a solitary soul could be seen on either territory. We had hoped to locate the German patrols, but unfortunately their post at Nakob was hidden by low ranges, as it lay in a sand-river below the general level of the country, though its position was easily identified by a prominent and abrupt granite kopje which stood in close proximity to it, but on British territory—the international beacons being plainly visible slightly to the westward of its base.

This bold hill was indeed the most striking landmark for many miles, and though I had never climbed it, I had passed its base often on either side, and believed that it must command a view of the German police post. I therefore suggested that we should make our way there that afternoon, when we could not only find out the strength of the Germans at the post, but possibly get some photos of them.

The troopers agreed, and later I rode down to the

camp with them, left my horse there, and as none of them would accompany me I went on alone, promising to flash a signal to them when I got on top. Naturally I had nothing to fear, for I had no intention of going into German territory or of letting the Germans see me, and I took care to leave my arms at the camp, so that, should their patrols catch me, I had nothing more incriminating than a camera, and a little shaving-mirror to signal with.

I had about two miles to go, making a slight detour to keep in cover of the thick *melk-bosch*, and aiming at keeping the hill between me and the Germans. I again noted the beacons; there was no doubt as to the whole hill being in our territory.

Within about a hundred yards of its base the bush ceased, and there was that distance of open sand to cross before I could get cover again; so I lay and watched, but there was no sign of a living being anywhere, and I scooted across and got among the big granite boulders, where I felt perfectly safe. Working cautiously upwards, I got about half-way to the top when, to my astonishment, I came upon a well-beaten track where horses had been taken up and down, and whilst I was still staring open-mouthed at the fresh spoors, I found that I was within a yard of a rough, loopholed schanz of rock, overlooking and commanding our territory! I knew our men had never been in the hill, and that it must have been made by the Germans, and I stood stock-still, expecting rifles to show through the loopholes at any moment. However, there was neither sound nor sign, and I crept on more carefully than ever, finding that the whole place had been strengthened with these schanzes, which were on British territory, and which commanded British territory for miles. At the top, surrounded by titanic boulders the size of a four-roomed cottage, there was a flat space about 40 feet square, where there was every sign of recent occupation—well-trampled paths, freshly broken stones, tools, and the still smouldering embers

of a fire ; whilst between the huge boulders schanzes had been built or were nearing completion. There had been a large number of men in the hill but recently, and they would undoubtedly return—indeed, there were probably some of them in the hill then ! I crept to the edge overlooking German territory, and could see the top of the police post, with the German flag flying, about 500 yards away westward, and a number of men and horses passing between a gap in that direction towards the water-pits, which, however, were not visible. I had but three films in my camera, and I took them as quickly as possible, for I felt sure there was a sentry there somewhere ; and sure enough, as I peered over the rocks down the western slope, I saw a solitary soldier coming up between the rocks, turning and motioning as though to others behind him. And I got down and into the bush like a scared klip-springer ; for these men, who had violated our territory, and were strengthening a position which commanded every approach for miles, were scarcely likely to show much ceremony to an Englishman found with a camera in the middle of their schanzes !

And I had hardly got into the friendly *melk-bosch* the other side of that awful bare hundred yards of sand at the base of the hill, when I saw them moving among the rocks at the top, where I had just left, and the sunshine glinting on rifle-barrels. I got back to the police camp as soon as I could, and told the police what I had seen, which by no means lessened their anxiety. They knew already that, failing the arrival of a strong force, they were simply like rats in a trap, and this violation of British territory, this seizing and strengthening of what was naturally the strongest position near Nakob, boded ill for the forlorn little outpost of five men. Moreover, should a force be on its way from either Upington or Kakamas, it would be in sight of this high kopje and the Germans for hours before we knew anything about it, and might very possibly choose the old route, which led within a few hundred

yards of the schanzes, and would thus walk right into an ambuscade.

None of the troopers could be spared to take a message, so it was decided, as soon as I could get my waggon well on the road, I should ride on to Upington and take the news myself. The garrison (?) of five slept away from the post, leaving it after dark and bivouacking in the hills.

On Sunday, there being still no sign of a relief force and no news, I loaded my waggon and struck camp, making up my mind to ride before daybreak next day, so that the Germans should not see that a messenger had left the camp.

That night there was an alarm amongst the Bastards and Hottentots at the police camp, all of them fleeing to the hills, for a spy who had been in the camp had warned them an attack was imminent.

The troopers lay on their arms at my waggon all night, but no attack came ; though in the morning the tell-tale sand showed where a patrol of the enemy had stood awaiting the return of their spy within fifty yards of our post, and by the spoors one of them had stood listening at the window. Our poor young troopers were in a most unenviable position. Their stores were exhausted, the waggon with their monthly supplies was many days overdue and might probably never arrive at all, they had no news or means of communication, they knew they were at the mercy of the Germans whenever they cared to attack, and yet they were bound to stick to their post. I left them a few spare stores I had, and in return they gave me the last few pounds of oats they had for my horse ; there would be no time to look for food along the road.

And so we bade them good-bye, and lumbered along with the heavy waggon till the hills hid us from the watchful eyes of the Germans on that big granite kopje in British territory, which should have been held by British troops as soon as possible after war was declared.

Behind the kopjes in Bak River I blew up all my

dynamite, just to give the Germans something to think about, and leaving Ford-Smith and the remnant of my gang to follow slowly with the waggon, I set the old nag on the long lonely trail for Upington. For the whole day I rode without seeing a solitary wayfarer, and night surprised me near the Molopo at Toeslan, where I had hoped to sleep ; so I lay amongst the thorn-trees by a big fire, roasting and freezing by turns, for the night was bitterly cold, and I rode light without coat or blanket. Next day I met one or two people, but no one had heard of troops for the border, and all I could hope was that, if they had gone by another road, they would not walk into an ambush at the big granite kopje.

Much of the journey of eighty-odd miles was through heavy sand and rough, rocky country, and it was nearly midnight of the second night when I crawled into Upington, both myself and the pony dead-beat, for he had eaten nothing but a handful of oats all day, and the two days of hard riding had again loosened my badly glued ribs.

I reported to the O.C. of the "S.A.M.R.," but he had no reinforcements to send, and knew no more of what was to happen on the border than did the poor little "garrison" at Nakob! Meanwhile my sworn statement was wired to Pretoria, where they took a serious view of the matter.

And so far, for a season, my prospecting ended, for even my humble little bark, used to floating on lonely seas or in placid backwaters, had been caught in the maelstrom of the War.

Note.—The post at Nakob was never relieved—Maritz and Beyers saw to that—and a full month later the place was attacked by Andries de Wet and 300 Germans with machine-guns, the hut riddled with bullets, Corporal Spencer killed, young Human's jaw blown away, and the rest of the "garrison" marched as prisoners into German territory. Riet-fontein and Obopogorop had to be abandoned, and

for a time the Gordonia border was left to the mercy of Andries de Wet and his renegade and German followers, until, a few weeks later, Maritz broke into open rebellion at Cnydas, where amongst other civilians he took my friend Ford-Smith a prisoner, and sent him to a long captivity in German South-West.—F. C. Cornell.

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